

Role Of Universities In Modern Times Part-II

M. Mukhlesur Rahman

The full time study programme will continue to be eroded and part time and mixed mode work, credit accumulation, transfer and much more flexible entry will become common-place.

The universities may have to move increasingly into sub-degree work, such as diplomas, professional, post experiences courses and access courses due to financial pressures and social awareness.

There will be a greater emphasis on skills, particularly in courses without an obvious vocational content.

There will be a greater interest in new teaching and learning techniques, including open and distance learning.

External scrutiny and assessment of teaching, research and finance will increase due to growing public awareness.

State funding will diminish for those whose teaching and research will not be as per requirement.

The staffing models will vary between universities and between subjects. The need for continuous training and updating will increase.

The autonomy of the state universities may be threatened more in future due to increasing relying tendencies on government funding.

All the above points go to show that there is marked diversity of mission and an even greater diversity of institutional culture. Listed below are some of the main issues:

(a) One of the main important responsibilities of the universities should be to uphold academic standards against the increasing threats to academic reputation.

(b) The 'dropout rate' or retention should be checked more carefully as this might be regarded as represent-

ing a loss to the public purse.

(c) The course and curricula at different disciplines should be modified in order to improve the skills, training and employment prospects of the students to fit them for employment market.

(d) The human and physical resources of the university should be used properly.

(e) Proper financial planning and control procedures should be in place to assure society that public money is not being wasted but is being used to best effect.

Challenges For Management:

The pressure and changes mentioned above are, however, great and challenging tasks for the university administration and management. Against this background, they have to prove their effectiveness in the achievement of the university objectives, by becoming much more responsive to the demands and needs of a rapidly changing society and by making the best use of limited resources.

The first challenge for the management is to improve the quality of teaching and research in a climate of financial contraction. It is true the effects of contraction on individual universities vary considerably, but whatever the pattern of contraction imposed upon universities, they face further constraints in their attempts to tackle the management problems of their new circumstances. One way to tackle contraction is to increase internal income.

The second challenge for the managerial persons is to become more efficient for maximising the use of

both human and physical resources which could be achieved through necessary reforms.

The third challenge is not only to maintain their stake in traditional markets where they operate, such as students, research funding, but also to develop new outlets such as services for industry and commerce.

The fourth challenge will involve the creation and maintenance of flexibility in drawing up rolling plans within the framework of a national higher education policy. Crucially, these plans must be dynamic and ready to adapt swiftly to whatever the future holds. Moreover, management have to be flexible in organisation activity and able to take decisions and implement them quickly.

The fifth challenge is for the university administration and management to manage all the changes with participative endeavour and to hold the morale of their staff.

The universities must have appropriate administrative and management structures which will ensure efficient, effective and economic utilization of available resources. They should achieve the best possible results and the degree of success should be measurable.

For a changing society, the administration and management of the universities should be capable of managing change. The post of vice chancellor should be like that of the chief executive in a business organisation who should be surrounded by competent and knowledgeable colleagues who are able to advise him quickly and effectively. The universities should, therefore, adopt a

cabinet style of administration instead of total reliance on the committee system. In practice, the vice chancellor, the pro-vice chancellor (s), and some senior administrators should meet regularly to decide on administrative and managerial issues. However, the executive type of management may use to continue to use university committees such as Academic Council/Senate, Faculty Boards, etc., for academic purposes, i.e. examination, curriculum, admissions, and research. For non-academic matters, decision making should normally be assigned to individual managers/officers without committee involvement or aided only by consultative committees. This arrangement would help universities to make faster decisions and implement them quickly. To support senior management, a central planning and resource allocation committee may be established which would be responsible to the senate and syndicate and would pull together all strands necessary to keep under review the strategic plan of the university.

It is important to note that universities are part of society, which is changing rapidly, and universities should not only be aware of these changes but be able to respond to them. Their basic role, therefore, is to serve society and respond to its needs, challenges and requirements as much as possible within their available resources.

The author is Deputy Director (Planning) of Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh. The view and suggestions expressed are his own.