

Strategically Thinking

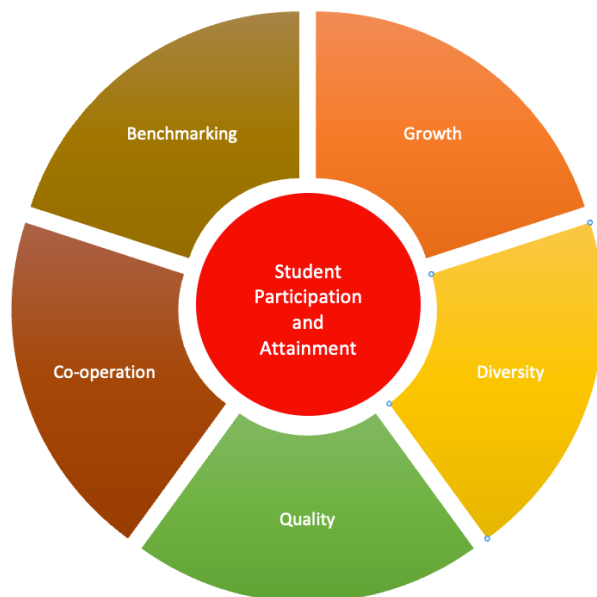
Greg Whateley

August 2024



As one year comes to an end (2024) and another is on the horizon (2025) the notion of strategic planning and associated thinking comes to the fore.

Higher Education Providers in Australia are required to have in place a well-thought-through and endorsed Strategic Plan (Threshold Standard 6.2.1b). The key elements of that plan can vary – my current thinking (benchmarked) is best captured in the following diagram –



With student **participation and attainment** at the heart of the plan – there are *five key elements* (in my view that is) that are used to measure success including – *growth, diversity, quality, co-operation and benchmarking*. I deal with each in turn.

Growth

Growth is fundamental to success - but it needs to be managed in a responsible and sustainable manner. Growth is important because it provides us with a level of confidence, and in turn, an available resource that helps provide for better student participation and attainment. Managing resources (both human and capital) becomes increasingly more complex as an organisation grows – this then becomes the accompanying challenge of growth.

Diversity

Diversity tells us about who we are. It also provides our domestic and international students with a truly national/international community experience on which we can overlay a quality operation. A diverse community reflects the diversity that is modern Australia.

Quality

Quality is an essential measure that is complex – yet, ironically, relatively straightforward. By establishing well-thought-through (and attainable) targets an organisation is able to monitor its own progress and at the same time be assured that student welfare is ‘maintained’ and quality outcomes (all measurable) are achieved. These measures need to be ‘realistic’ to ensure morale and positive reinforcement. Too often the targets set are inappropriate or far too ‘stretch’.

Co-operation

Co-operation has become a vital issue for many organisations. The notion of working co-operatively with other like institutions – in both the fields of training and education have become essential – in some cases ‘life saving’. The development of joint initiatives provides both staff and students with a range of extended opportunities. In my thoughts – also an excellent means of improving profile.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking (both internal and external) is essential and helps us to understand ourselves better and map our performance accordingly. By developing benchmarking partners and associated opportunities we can further consider the work we are doing through the ‘lenses’ of other providers – big and small – and take away the best parts of the exercise to reinforce or improve our own performance.

Strategic Planning cannot be effective if done in isolation. Every attempt is made to include as many staff and stakeholders as possible benchmarking is also important. Targets need to be challenging – yet realistic. Ongoing reporting against the KPIs is also fundamental to success and continuous improvement and this should be done on a regular basis – ideally, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually. There can never be too much sharing and communication!

Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley has recently retired from the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (UBSS) and Chief Executive Officer (GCA). He is currently working as a consultant with the Australian Guild of Education (AGE) in Melbourne.