

Institutionalising Community and Industry Engagement in a Research University: the Essentials of Stewardship and Partnerships

by Prof. Dato' Dr. Saran Kaur Gill

Across the globe, there is increasing expectation from societies for universities to collaborate with diverse stakeholders to contribute to the social, economic, health and environmental needs of communities across the region. This requires universities to move beyond the Ivory Tower to one that emerges closer, connected, accessible, and relevant to society and the nation. (OECD: 2010)

It is in response to the above essential need that the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education established at senior management level the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships for the four research universities in Malaysia in September 2007. The aim of this was to lead in the development and application of multi-stakeholder collaboration and “to exercise stewardship to coordinate and handle actors and interactions not under their full control but critical to the performance of the sector.” (The World Bank: 2012) The critical players in the sector that make up the Penta-Helix Partnership are higher education, NGOs and Communities, Industries and Foundations, Govt Agencies and IT and Media partners. It is these players that forge meaningful and sometimes challenging partnerships to address problems facing communities across the region.

In this context, this paper presents the case of a research university, focusing specifically on Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and how it has faced the challenges of developing at institutional level a sustainable industry and community engagement eco-system that promotes, applies and gains from knowledge and expertise to address socio-economic and environmental problems, whilst creating mutually beneficial partnerships. This eco-system will include governance structures, systems, and specific measures of engagement developed to address the following challenges: “the lack of support across national and institutional systems, a gap between strategic plans and operational systems, lack of funding streams and promotional recognition and lack of capacity building to develop qualities essential for engagement.” (Goddard and Puukka, 2008 and Goddard and Vallance, 2010) Additionally, the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships between the penta-helix sectors is critical in this field. This paper will cover the challenges of the trajectory towards the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships, the ethics of partnership and essential indicators for success for university-industry-community partnerships