LIVING VALUES

THE PROCESS OF REVIEWING AND FORMULATING VALUES

This section is an extract from the Guidelines. It focuses on reviewing and formulating values.

1. Previous paragraphs of the Guidelines have indicated that there may be a variety of conditions, both internal and external, with threats and opportunities, which may stimulate the initiation of the review of institutional values. The aim is to establish the use of values as a permanent and ongoing feature of university life, engaging staff and students and embedded across the institution and its functions. This is discussed in the following section of the Guidelines. The successful embedding of values, rests in large measure, on the success of the processes adopted to initiate and develop the values in the first place. The effectiveness of these processes inevitably conditions subsequent successful embedding. Universities are, of course, free to develop their own processes, but the following guidance, which is based on evidence from the pilot universities, is included to assist.

2. It is evident from experience in a wide range of institutional settings that there are some generic operating characteristics which can usefully underpin the process of designing and implementing the Living Values project to achieve maximum effectiveness. These include *inter alia:*

   - the engagement of relevant stakeholders, internal and external, in acceptance of the need for, and the design and execution of the initiative from the outset, thus creating clear and legitimised ownership and commitment;
   - leadership from the top of the university and buy-in of leaders at various levels to an aspirational focus;
   - a bottom-up focus, but within a clear and agreed overall framework, and with a two-way honest and frank communications flow between those responsible for serving and those contributing;
   - a process which is manageable and well managed, implying a limited number of critical values, a robust but achievable timescale, a project management approach and a well-informed process supported by accurate and relevant data;
   - a goal of achieving maximum impact, but with the recognition that embedding values is a continuous and interactive process.

3. The process should naturally **engage all relevant constituencies** including:

   a. staff at all levels, academic, administrative and technical across all units/departments of the university;
   b. students at all programme levels and across all departments and schools, including students' organisations and those involved in the students' consultative structures;

<ol type="a" start="3">
relevant external stakeholders, including those from the business, political and social communities and governing agencies;
senior university leaders and members of governing boards.

Each constituency will have different preferred means of engaging with the process; hence it is recommended to be flexible rather than to force dialogue into a prescriptive straitjacket or too limited a timeframe.

4. The project needs an effective **project leader**, normally an academic member of staff at a senior level to ensure the academic credibility of the project; to enhance trust and to endow the process with appropriate authority. The characteristics needed in such a leader would include inspirational qualities, excellent process and project management skills, and good communication skills. Experience reveals that his/her effectiveness also depends on:

- the full backing and support of the head of the institution in terms of process and contributions to discussions on strategy, content and direction;
- a sufficiently long period of assignment to ensure the process is not only developed but embedded;
- a supporting project team to steer the process and provide expert guidance, supporting data and logistical assistance and
- the full cooperation of heads of academic and administrative units in design and implementation stages.

5. There are a whole range of **mechanisms** which can be deployed **to ensure the involvement and commitment** of the various institutional and stakeholder constituencies. These include:

- the use of the Guidelines;
- the use of Delphi techniques (successive questionnaires to sample constituents) to refine drafts;
- initial staff induction conference briefings;
- an institutional Living Values webpage with scope for interactive dialogue;
- briefing sessions for managers and department heads and subsequent progress workshops;
- open meetings and fora;
- focus groups.

Again, it is emphasised that some of these methods will be more appropriate to some constituency groups than others, implying a pragmatic, but also systematic approach.

The precise configuration and timing of these events needs careful consideration. Experience points to the value of holding various exhibitions to demonstrate visually how values are being already manifested in the work of the university (in education, research and development, community engagement etc.) as a springboard of encouragement to further action.

These are helpful in demonstrating impact, in emphasising the positive benefits of Living Values and in fostering collective cohesion.

6. It is recommended that the process be undertaken over a reasonable period of time to enable full involvement and one or more iterations between different levels and sections of the university. This implies several stages in the evolution of the project,

corresponding with its life cycle. Experience indicates the following sequence tends to work:

- Phase I: Initiation and Plan

    o agreement that the project is needed at the university for explicit reasons and for particular outcomes;
    o backing and legitimisation by university leadership;
    o mandate given to an individual/committee to carry out the project
    o clarification of its relationship to any related initiatives;
    o design of the processes of preparation, consultation and definition of the expected final outcome at the outset and
    o agreement of project timetable in outline.

- Phase II: Identification of a Map of Values

    o consideration of each of the MCO fundamental values and their operating characteristics and add any items of particular interest to your university;
    o determination of whether there are any other values which the university regards as important which are not adequately covered by the MCO fundamental values;
    o testing of provisional values selected with constituencies (para.15) through appropriate methods (selected from para. 18);
    o synthesis and agreement of values to proceed with and
    o developing and disseminating a shared definition of selected values.

- Phase III: Definition of operational manifestations of selected values

    o conversion of each value into set of related overarching policy statements, behaviours, actions;
    o testing out by steering support group or direct into constituencies of operational manifestations and ratification with constituencies and
    o synthesis and agreement of values to proceed with.

- Phase IV: Conversion of behaviours/manifestations into university functions/domains of university activity

    These could include e.g.

    o Governance and Management/Leadership
    o Education (programme design and validation, evaluative criteria; Quality Assurance (QA); learning experience; internationalisation)
    o research (themes; approaches, QA; doctorate, internationalisation)
    o Students
    o Outreach (Continuing Professional Development; Knowledge Exchange)
    o Human Resources (profile; appointment; staff appraisal; development)
    o Finance
    o Marketing, brand and identity

    and indicating sought after behaviours as a result of consultation with relevant constituencies.

- Phase V: Conversion of behaviours/manifestations into desired behaviour patterns of actors in the university – how to live out the values e.g. for

  - Governing Boards and Academic Committees
  - Senior Leadership
  - Middle level leadership
  - Staff as individuals
  - Students

  in consultation with the respective constituent groups.

- Phase VI: Conversion of outcomes into the university's Strategic Plan and its iteration at unit levels on an ongoing basis in consultation with respective constituent groups.

- Phase VII: Reflection on the process and its effectiveness, and, at an appropriate time, the commencement of the next cycle and iteration.

7. Universities may, of course, prefer to vary the configuration suggested above according to local traditions, cultures, circumstances, issues and desired timescales. However, if insufficient time is spent on Phases I, II and III it is likely to have negative consequences for the subsequent Phases IV, V and VI.

   Account should also thus be taken of the likelihood of iteration backwards in the sequence for further clarifications and challenges. This should be built into the provisional timetable.

8. Having completed the above phases (or whatever phases have been seen as appropriate), the university will then need to ensure that the values and their operational manifestations become progressively embedded in the life of the university. If the above processes have been conducted properly, there should already be widespread commitment, but ongoing sustainability is clearly vital if the values are indeed to live effectively. The process of discussing values and determining which to adopt is in itself likely to raise awareness of values and adherence to them across the university.

9. This will be more likely if the foregoing phases are **genuinely diagnostic** in nature, in that the institution may wish to establish

   - whether the institution is satisfied or not with the present situation;
   - what difficulties, if any, there are in the implementation of the value;
   - what are the origins of the difficulties (e.g. statutory, political, behavioural);
   - what are the sources of the difficulties (e.g. internal to the university, agency, political, clients and stakeholders);
   - what are the consequences of the difficulties and
   - what action should be taken to alleviate or remove the difficulty.

   This will begin to ensure that the project will have the potential of contributing to the evolution of the institutions academic and other processes and strategic plan.

10. Finally, evidence concerning the **role of the university head** in the processes might usefully be considered. Experience shows that this is likely to be a critical factor, both

in terms of existing incumbents and those newly starting in the role. The following observations may be helpful:

- heads of institutions may wish to use the Living Values project to develop the academic or research performance of the university, change the culture and climate of the university, update the university mission, help reposition it, and use its outcomes to provide major inputs to the strategic plan, institutional reform and development and stakeholder engagements processes.

- an incoming rector arriving at a university where values are already explicit, might

    o accept and work with them;
    o query whether the existing values are appropriate for new circumstances or challenges;
    o from a personal point of view, suggest refinements or additions to existing values and their manifestations, and indeed the "values processes" themselves.

- the support of the head is critical in providing backing for the project leader in terms of processes and content, opening doors, and facilitating commitment.

All the above is, of course, important in the steps to be taken to embed the institution's values in its day to day processes and operations and its continuing evolution, to which we now turn.

JLD et al