



## Same but Different: Conceptions and Management of Institutional Policy in The United States, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea

The Institutional Policy Project was initiated in 2013 to broaden our understanding of higher education institutional policy. Institutional policy is an important although somewhat disparaged governance mechanism that establishes principles, parameters and “road maps” for institutional operations. Institutional policy interprets and operationalises government policy and legislation, represents a key element of institutional risk mitigation and quality assurance strategies, and guides decision-making.

The Institutional Policy Project is exploring higher education institutional policy across several jurisdictions, including the United States, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. The Institutional Policy Project represents a collaboration between the University of Melbourne, University of California – Berkeley, Otago Polytechnic, Pacific Adventist University and Island Research and Consultants. The project involved analysis of publicly available governance documentation, conduct of semi-structured interviews with policy practitioners and senior institutional managers in the United States, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, and administration of a survey across these jurisdictions. This presentation builds on the paper presented at the Association of University Administrators (AUA) in Manchester, United Kingdom in April, 2014, and provide additional analysis of research data collected.

The Institutional Policy Project explores three key questions: ‘How do higher education institutions conceive “policy”?’, ‘How do higher education institutions manage institutional policy?’, and ‘How do higher education institutions conceive the “policy cycle”?’ The project also explores current and potential congruence between higher education institutional policy and compliance, audit, quality, risk, strategy and budget, and delegations of authority. The survey explored institutional meta-policy (“policy on policy”), policy instruments, approval authorities, the policy cycle, policy evaluation and review, compliance with legislation and policy, professional development and policy resources, policy library and website, policy management, institutional data systems, and characteristics of policy actors.

Despite fundamentally different contexts, organisational structures and missions across institutions in the United States, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, and internal variation in these jurisdictions, the research revealed many commonalities in terms of conceptions of policy and the policy cycle, and approaches towards policy management. The research also revealed shared challenges with respect to the gap between policy documentation (texts) and institutional practices (essentially policy implementation). Similarly, shared challenges were identified with respect to policy implementation evaluation capacity and activity, limited policy-dedicated human resources, and organisational “respect” for institutional

policy. The research also revealed fundamental differences arising from contextual variation, principally including government higher education policy and cultural differences. The presentation is intended to communicate key findings to practitioners, including examples of good practice, to support the ongoing improvement of institutional policy making, implementation and evaluation.