Post-secondary education & social justice

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Garrod and Macfarlane (2007: 579) argue that “Duals represent a distinct type of modern university.” They explain that even though dual-sector universities are differentiated by their national policy and social contexts, origins and sectoral relationships, the principal reason given for their creation “is the desire to develop ‘seamlessness’ within the post-secondary education system in the interests of social justice by improving progression opportunities into higher education.” Despite their national differences, the duals “offer the potential to realise the vision of lifelong learning crossing the boundary between the sectors that exist in post-secondary education” (Garrod and Macfarlane 2007: 579). While other universities may proclaim social justice as part of their defining mission and ethos, the notion of *seamlessness* distinguishes dual-sector institutions from other tertiary education institutions through providing the mechanism for achieving social justice, democracy, access and opportunity. The possibility of seamlessness promises to transcend boundaries between educational sectors; between academic and vocational preparation; and between theoretical knowledge and skill.

Do dual-sector institutions fulfil this promise? Is there anything intrinsic about dual-sector institutions that enable them to make a unique contribution to social justice? This chapter argues that dual-sector institutions have the potential to make a distinctive contribution to social justice because of their dual-sector character, but being a dual-sector is not a guarantee that they will do so. They can also contribute to social stratification by entrenching differences between types of qualifications and sectors, and by contributing to hierarchical relations within and between sectors. While dual-sectors may provide more *access* to higher education (HE), it may be to qualifications and a system that is more differentiated by hierarchies in status, outcomes and access to social power. The extent to which they contribute to social justice or social stratification depends in large part on the broader social and policy context in their country.

This chapter addresses these issues through differentiating between the *intrinsic* purpose or logic of dual-sector institutions, and the *institutional* logic that shapes the way in which the different sectors engage at the systemic and institutional level. It argues that while the intrinsic logic of dual-sector institutions promotes seamlessness and boundary crossing, the institutional logic often undermines these objectives. It identifies the nature of the tertiary education field and positional differentiation within the field as an important causal mechanism in shaping patterns of opportunity and the extent to which the dual-sectors are able to realise their intrinsic logic. Finally, it considers the way in which dual-sector institutions can make a distinctive contribution through identifying systemic and institutional approaches that can be implemented to support social justice outcomes.