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Case Study Extracted From:

When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

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When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education

Case Study of Practice

Curriculum Blueprinting: A Design Methodology

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1. Context

Harper Adams University is a small, specialist institution and the innovation presented in this case study was undertaken across all of our undergraduate provision. Stakeholders were from all parts of the university, including the central learning and teaching team, academic departments, students' union and student body, and facilities managers, as well as other professional services teams, and technical staff.

Our approach to quality management is embedded across the institution, but led by our Academic Registrar and colleagues within a central team. Quality enhancement and QA functions work very closely together.

2. The innovation

We developed an innovative methodology for curriculum review, focusing on programme-level thinking to ensure that the student-journey was at the heart of the development activity. We worked to link the development into all university functions, rather than making it solely the interest of teaching staff, because we recognise the importance of a one-team approach. The review was reflective and recognised problems which occur in curriculum work, as a contested space. One of the key challenges was finding time simply to get together, so we developed an approach where protected time took colleagues off-timetable, providing space for focused development work. The methodology gave steps for each team to take, starting with programme-level planning and developing a 'blueprint' of the student journey, and then moving into thinking about what the exact programme would look like. Only after these steps did the process of module-commissioning take place.

We wanted to refresh our curriculum and design-out challenges which are common in HE. Curriculum renewal is a special moment in time, and we can make choices which help or hinder student and staff experiences; we took an anticipatory approach to the design. The project team shared a values-statement of how the work would be undertaken and a member of the team had dedicated responsibility for accessibility and inclusion. It was important that professional services colleagues were involved deeply in curriculum, teams and validation processes, so that their vantage point was visible to programme teams.

⁹ Harper Adams University



We wanted to ensure that the process was not unnecessarily difficult; we wanted it to be enjoyable and fruitful. Making space to engage, and reducing documentation mattered. We moved from documenting every step to holding live events to generate constructive feedback or critical questions. This was a changing tone from a model which was previously based on 'proposal and scrutiny'. We opted to take a collegial and collaborative tone, where ideas were presented in-person and discussed, with feedback from different parts of the university. Issues could be dealt with constructively by bringing different stakeholders together.

The project was approximately two years. The first stage was a trial with three trailblazer course areas, who helped co-develop the methodology. The second stage involved all remaining undergraduate courses. Third, and ongoing, is work to connect curriculum teams into all the parts of the university to ensure thoughtful planning about rollout (and teach out the previous curriculum).

3. Outcomes

We are currently conducting a formal evaluation of our work, with an external reviewer appointed to assess the impact and the lessons learned. Despite the ongoing nature of this evaluation, certain transformative outcomes are already evident.

- Programme-level thinking has become ingrained in our discourse surrounding learning, teaching, assessment, course development, and validation. Recognising the importance of considering the students' entire journey in curriculum design is a perspective we are committed to retaining.
- Engaging professional services teams has heightened our awareness around issues of accessibility and inclusion. A notable development from this is the inclusion of a professional services team member, such as learner support or academic guidance, on all our development teams and validation panels, enhancing the inclusivity of our courses.
- Collaboration with industry and schools has prompted us to rethink our graduates attributes for the future, ensuring our curriculum remains relevant and forward-thinking.
- By narrating the student journey at the design stage, we have strived to simplify our documentation, making the presentation of ideas more accessible and streamlined.
- The collaboration between diverse teams – including facilities, estates, technology, and academic departments – in rolling out the curriculum has fostered a greater understanding of our operational context. This is promoting a culture of mutual respect and cooperation, which are university values and the basis of our new University Strategy (Together we Make the Difference).

The curriculum is now in the rollout-phase, and we are actively seeking feedback from students enrolled in these courses to gauge their effectiveness. Simultaneously, we are reviewing our methodology to better understand its impact and the challenges. Our goal was to develop a manageable, inclusive curriculum, grounded in authentic assessments that reflect true learning. While we have made significant progress in developing and partially rolling out these courses, it will take another three to four years to complete a full lifecycle of the curriculum and fully evaluate this.

Looking ahead, we plan to apply this methodology to the development of other courses. At the core of our approach is a focus on programme-level outcomes and graduate attributes, fostering deep discussions and debates, and prioritising curriculum work. Our methodology is not rigid but is based on a set of principles we advocate for flexible application.

4. Takeaways

- Having clear values underpinning curriculum work acts as a compass for all that follows.
- Curriculum is contested as it involved making choices about what can and cannot be included; respect and trust among colleagues is therefore an essential foundation of constructive curriculum innovation.

- Considering how and when teams can be enabled to engage deeply is important to success.
- Events and opportunities for engagement across teams helps to identify possible challenges and opportunities; curriculum should not be developed in academic silos.
- Considering the programme journey can, and should, drive the development of modules and assessment.