Curriculum reform initiatives in higher education

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The 21st century economy and the call for reform

Universities are taking the lead to respond to 21st century global challenges by undertaking whole scale reviews of their undergraduate education provision ...............  

The overall aim of the project is to explore why, how, and with what effect on the student learning experience, have universities undertaken whole-institution curriculum reform.  

(HEA)
21st century skillset

- knowledge management
- community management
- collaboration
- connected leadership
- creative thinking
- critical thinking

+ basic literacy
  - information literacy
  - network literacy
  - global literacy

= global fluency

Higher Education needs to embed these skills in curricula

Skills, entrepreneurship and mining for mobile phone components DR Congo
The 21st century economy and the call for reform

• Rhetoric and reality

• Global context, global knowledge economy

• Institutional change and curriculum change
Big issues – small, fast research

Research Questions:

1. What self-scrutiny, strategies, planning and processes do universities that have successfully reformed the curriculum undertake?

2. How do these universities measure and evaluate the impact of whole curriculum reform?
Big issues – small, fast research

• Other peoples thinking – the value of fieldwork
• Do those working in the sector recognise ‘whole institutional curriculum reform’ as taking place?
• What might it mean for students?
• Lens of institutional/organisational activities
• Focus on social action and commentary on experiences
Research approach

- Draws on OU connections and support
- Support and great organisation from case study contacts
- Uses NVIVO to manage large volume of data

Call for participants
10 follow up interviews

3 Case Studies

Thematic analysis - check to wider group interviews
Themes

• Leadership, Vision, Engagement

• Timescales, decision points and staff development

• Endings, evaluation and continuing curriculum development
Leadership, vision, and engagement

Leadership vision
- for the institution
- Expectations of (and from) followers

Leadership Styles
- A relationship with organisational size?
- Distributed leadership and academic leadership

Engagement with staff and students
- Related to leadership styles
- Related to the phases of the initiative
The timing and shape of initiatives

• Some organisational and project literature identifies a linear approach to projects
• Time is a factor – leadership and approach
## Timescales and decision points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of reform</th>
<th>Precursors</th>
<th>Phase 1: Architecture</th>
<th>Phase 2: Redesign and Revalidation</th>
<th>Phase 3: Implementation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variations in time identified</td>
<td>Previous 2 years</td>
<td>1 year (to 3 years)</td>
<td>Shortest 6 months, most frequently 1 year</td>
<td>Big- Bang or phased implementation</td>
<td>Varies from no explicit evaluation to routine 5 year.</td>
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<td>Exceptionally 2 and 3 years</td>
<td>Immediate whole institution start to maximum 5 years, commonly 3 years.</td>
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Dimensions of change

Curriculum Architecture
Disciplinary content
Teaching and learning

Organisational issues
Teaching and learning practices (or learning and teaching)
Student experiences
Dimensions of Reform + Distance Travelled / The Royal Conservatoire, Scotland

**Organisation**
- Market Positioning: Maintain current mix of local and international students
- Size: Slow and small expansion in student numbers
- Portfolio Offer: Small planned increase in portfolio offer
- Admission Practices: No planned change to admission practices

**Teaching & Learning**
- T&L Pedagogy: Staff focus on T&L pedagogy for the creative arts. Specific role for supporting pedagogy established; Staff engagement with PG Cert of Higher Arts Education
- Assessment: New assessment framework including common assessment scale for the institution
- Curriculum Offer (Content): Rewritten curriculum content with external and student contributions; new 'choice' modules for all students; new opportunities for collaborative work for all students

**Student Experience**
- Tutorial & Student Support: New transitions tutor system adopted to support progression for all students; New on-line PDP tool for all students to support learning
- Choice and Autonomy in Learning: All students supported in collaborative learning and in taking a 'choice' module to enhance or broaden their studies; some students design their own learning outcomes for the choice module; Focus on student autonomy
- Graduateness: Graduateness statement agreed & supported by HEAR & Learning Outcomes across all qualifications
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Maintain current position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market Positioning</td>
<td>Maintain current mix of local and international students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Maintain close to current student numbers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio Offer</td>
<td>Reduce some sub-degree options for qualifications (certificates removed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admission Practices</td>
<td>Tightening admission criteria &amp; raise offer to support achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>T&amp;L Pedagogy</td>
<td>Ensure all modules have learning outcomes that include ‘Graduateness’ outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Move from end of semester examinations to end of year examinations. Introductions of formative assessment. Teamwork % assessment agreed for qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Offer (Content)</td>
<td>Some curriculum revived content for CH + employer needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tutorial &amp; Student Support</td>
<td>Policy embedded in curriculum offer for all faculties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choice and Autonomy in Learning</td>
<td>Fewer optional modules for students (? → %) Fewer modules within a qualification. Modules of greater breadth.</td>
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<td>Graduateness</td>
<td>Graduateness statement agreed &amp; embedded in Learning Outcomes across all qualifications and supported by HEAR</td>
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Staff Development

• Informal and formal approaches
• Collaborative, boundary-crossing teams – third space professionals
• Space and time for all contributors
• Paid contributions for sessional academics, students and alumni
• Developing an enthusiasm and confidence in future curriculum development and reform initiatives
Endings, evaluations and continuities

• Blurred endings
• Evaluation and Curriculum development
• Knowledge for the 21st Century
• Institutional shape and form
Investigating institutional curriculum change

- Organisational change and leadership theory
- Policy borrowing and academic drift
- What is being reformed? – knowledge in the curriculum
- Curriculum dimensions and direction of travel
- Learning and teaching/teaching and learning
- Staff and Students
Curriculum reform and the knowledge economy

• Whole institutions and curriculum reform

• Evaluation – who is it for, how does it help?

• The place of history and longitudinal research
Considerations when embarking upon reform

Shaping reform initiatives
• Institutional issues and future visions
• Leadership style and engagement

Implementation
• Mode, risks and support for change
• Staff, student and curriculum issues
• Evaluation and future developments