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The Matrix: Reviewing, Re-ordering and Regenerating Undergraduate Provision for post-2012.

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Abstract:

The University of Hull's Faculty of Education has provision split across two campuses: Teacher Education and Education Studies. With the approach of 2012 funding process the Head of Education Studies requested a review of undergraduate degrees in Education Studies (non QTS) with the overall aim of providing a more efficient, effective and integrated undergraduate provision. Specific objectives were to develop UG provision to ensure that we:

- Strengthened cross campus working;
- Minimised competition between campuses ;
- Maximised good practice;
- Shared expertise (administrative as well as academic);
- Supported strategies for internationalisation and the development of Technology Enhanced Learning.

This paper reports on the process of review and specifically on the work undertaken by the Chair of the Review Panel, Dr. Ken Spencer, in developing a matrix of modules that allowed for a comparison of provision. The instrument he developed not only catalogued the 140+ modules that were in existence for UG degree programmes (and provided direct access to module specifications via URL links), but also entered module provision into a matrix through use of a spreadsheet that allowed the provision to be sorted and compared through use of many variables. As a consequence the review team were not only able to analyse the viability of the provision, but were also in a position to advise the development team of priorities. This paper will allow BESA delegates to see the matrix in action and evaluate the applicability of such an approach for their own use.

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The Matrix: Reviewing, Re-ordering and Regenerating Undergraduate Provision for post 2012.

Introduction

This paper reports on the experience of reviewing the undergraduate degree provision offered by the Faculty of Education in the University of Hull. From September 2012 publicly funded providers of higher education in England will derive their income entirely from student fees which, in most cases, will be financed for students from the European Union (EU) through a government loan scheme. Fees for EU students on undergraduate degree programmes are to be set between £6-9000 per year with numbers capped for each institution. There will be open competition nationally, however, for students who achieve high entry standard ('A' level equivalent of AAB or 340+ UCAS points), while some institutions who charge fees of less than £7500 also being allowed to compete for a greater proportion of students. The University of Hull will charge the full allowable fee of £9000. The university is thus competing for a smaller pool of students from 2012 onwards and has been obliged to make plans for a 10 per cent reduction in recruitment to its suite of BA degree programmes in Education and Education Studies. Currently the faculty recruits to a target of c150 students per year across two departments who are located on different campuses.

The faculty will thus face stiff competition for student recruitment not only from rival providers, but also within the university as whole where other faculties will be looking to take advantage of any under-recruitment in order to boost their own numbers. Within the sector providers will be ranked in terms of Key Information Sets (KIS) which are to be published and available to all prospective students. KIS will report on a range of indicators including *inter-alia* staff-student ratios and capital expenditure. With these issues in mind the Head of Education Studies initiated a review of undergraduate degrees in Education Studies (non QTS) during the early months of 2012 with the overall aim of providing a more efficient, effective and integrated undergraduate provision. Specific objectives were to develop UG provision to ensure that the faculty:

- Strengthened cross campus working;
- Minimised competition between campuses ;
- Maximised good practice;
- Shared expertise (administrative as well as academic);
- Supported strategies for internationalisation and the development of Technology Enhanced Learning.

Undergraduate degree provision within the Faculty of Education

The faculty offers a range of provision across two campuses, based at Hull and Scarborough, which are categorised into Teacher Education and Education Studies. The head of each department thus has a twin role in being site manager for staff based on their 'home' campus whilst also being strategic leader for their subject across campus. At the time of this review the Head of Education Studies (second author of this paper) was based at the Hull campus. In addition to provision within the subject area of Education Studies the faculty also offers both undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education courses leading to qualified teacher status (QTS), with this provision being the historical bedrock of each department.

The faculty launched a suite of Bachelor of Arts honours degrees in Educational Studies in 2003 and later added additional programmes in response to market demand and new government initiatives. The original BA (Hons) in Educational Studies was aligned across campus and featured both single and joint honours programmes (e.g. BA Educational Studies with Psychology; BA Educational Studies and Early Years Education). A later addition to the suite was a BA (Hons) in Children's Inter-Professional Services. In 2007 the provision was reviewed further with Hull campus subsequently offering BA Education (with various single and joint honours derivations) whilst the Scarborough campus continued to offer the BA Educational Studies.

In addition to this range of full-time first degrees, the faculty also offers full- and part-time Foundation Degrees on both campuses and part-time top-up degrees leading to BA (Hons) and BA (Hons) with QTS. The Scarborough campus is also home to the full-time BA Education with QTS which shares a number of modules with the BA Educational Studies. This has allowed the Scarborough campus to sustain the BA Educational Studies with some 50 students per year by running joint modules with the QTS provision. Meanwhile the Hull campus has been running its full-time BA suite alongside full- and part-time FD provision for c100 FTE students per year, supplemented by the part-time top-up degrees. To complicate matters further, for in the period 2007-2010 the university treated the Scarborough campus as a separate faculty, meaning that the staff of Scarborough School of Education (SSE) were line managed by two Deans.

By the beginning of 2012 although relationships between academic staff at the two campuses were good there was little evidence of cross-campus collaborative planning, course provision and quality assurance with limited opportunities for liaison and cohesion. The initial review of UG provision showed there to be a total of 140 modules at Levels 4, 5 & 6 running on 14 degree routes with 11 Programme Directors for approximately 450 students.

Two of these programmes were run in conjunction with departments in other faculties (Social Sciences; Health and Social Care) and one FD programme was collaborative provision with five colleges in the region. Only one education module was offered as a free elective, with one degree from another faculty contributing to student numbers (BA Education, Philosophy & Theology). The consequence was a small, but significant, net loss to the faculty in terms of student income.

The Review Process

The review process began in August 2011 following the appointment of the Head of Education Studies (based at Hull). Terms of reference were agreed within the faculty by nominated stakeholders and a formal review panel was established and chaired by the first author of this paper. In addition to the five aims listed above the review panel was also to:

- consider approaches to reflecting on and analysing data resulting in clear and informed examination of performance of CES UG provision in context of NSS and league table indicators including entry qualifications, student achievement, student employability, student experience;
- identify potential issues in respect of support for provision (administrative and academic) that operates across two campuses.

The terms of reference also identified potential benefits for students in that they were to seek more coherent programmes that maximized student potential to increase employment prospects and potential benefits for staff to seek more efficient use of resources (staff and physical) in order to provide greater opportunities for scholarship and research, and course development. Panel members were to attend meetings of the review panel, participate in interviews with stakeholders, participate in the development of a review report under the guidance and leadership of the chair. Of the six members of the panel two were chosen who were representative of UG provision from both campuses (but not Programme Directors) and were joined by a student representative, a colleague from another faculty and an external academic.

The first report of the panel was published in December 2012 and was based on a series of interviews conducted with Programme Directors from both campuses. The interview schedule, which had been agreed by the panel and approved by the stakeholders, consisted of nine interview themes and 31 subsidiary questions. The report also contained a case study of Research Method modules conducted by the Chair of the panel.

Constructing the Matrix

In undertaking the case study of research methods initially a table was constructed that simply identified the range of validated modules that were currently operational (see figure 1, below). Hyperlinks were then added to the table to module specifications on university web-site (www.course.hull.ac.uk).

		Level
01534	Research Methods	5
12172	Approaches to Research	5
12337	Research Methods	5
12147	Research Methodology	6
12421	Educational Research Methods	6
52095	Educational Research Methods	6
01432	Project	5
12174	Project Module	5
12148	Dissertation (40 credits)	6
12322	Independent Research Project (40 credits)	6
12340	Dissertation: Long thin (40 credits)	6
12347	Dissertation: L-shape (40 credits)	6
12422	Independent Research Project (40 credits)	6
52096	Independent Research Project	6

Figure 1- Research Methods Modules

This case study thus allowed the researcher to compare and contrast module rationale, aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching strategies, methods of assessment and learning resources. As a consequence the case study provided an opportunity to assess the common approaches within research methods modules and to suggest ways in which all programmes could provide outcomes that met QAA Benchmarks.

The full matrix was constructed for all modular provision (see Figure 2, below)

The matrix table displays a grid of module provision. The columns represent different modules, and the rows represent individual modules with their details. The table includes a 'Level' column and a 'Student Number' column. The table is partially obscured by a large black redaction box.

Figure 2 – The matrix of combined provision

The Matrix in Action

The matrix is basically a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel) albeit with some reasonably sophisticated macros. Each module (vertical axis) and programme (horizontal axis) has a direct link to the on-line database of course provision. Choosing a variable allows for similar modules (which have been categorised according to subject/focus thus allows for provision to be compared and, subsequently, reviewed.

The Case Study: Research Methods

All programmes that feature in the undergraduate provision have a module concerned with research methods that has as a post-requirement the completion of a project or dissertation module. The research method modules appear at level 5 and 6, with the project/dissertation being predominantly level 6.

The main headings for this case study report are:

1. The purpose of Research Methods modules
2. Levelness, pre- & post- requirements
3. Core topics/content
4. Resources
5. Managing change

By making appropriate use of the matrix, the Chair of the Review Panel was able to compare and contrast across the undergraduate provision and to develop suitable questions to fuel a debate amongst the stakeholders and the course teams as to the nature and content of research methods. This is an important point in that the matrix was not used for conclusions, but as a trigger for further discourse. As a consequence the case study was able to develop lines of enquiry that might, for example, clarify the purpose of research methods. The following outcome emerged as a consequence of this first level analysis:

There could be 3 components to a research strand within undergraduate programmes:

1. METHODOLOGY module(s) that deal with the wide array of approaches to research in education – this aspect will not be linked to a research project, but provides the basis for students to decide on appropriate methods to be used in their Independent Research Projects. Assessment could be in the form of a variety of tests, and write-ups of workshop results.
2. PROPOSAL module that specifically develops a viable research proposal, based on the previous METHODOLOGY module(s), including a literature review and proposals for data analysis and presentation.
3. RESEARCH module, during which information/data is gathered and analysed, and written up as a research paper.

Note: 2 and 3 above could be combined into a 40 credit module.

In turn this was debated with the stakeholders, programme directors and course teams and a working party established to rationalise the provision. In the main the driving factor such rationalisation was to enhance the student experience, although there are obviously a number of other 'benefits' to be accrued.

Key Findings

By February 2012 the Head of Education Studies had received the report from the external academic and was able to report the following key findings.

There is a lack of cohesiveness between programmes and cross-campus provision. Degrees appear to have been developed largely in isolation of each other with one consequence being that opportunities for collaboration and development have been limited. There are also concerns that provision is not closely aligned to the market and to the subject benchmarks (where they exist) issued by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

The principal conclusion to be drawn is that the range, content and pedagogies of UG degree provision need to be reviewed in line with the following key principles:

- Undergraduate degrees in Education (FD, single or joint honours) should correspond to QAA Benchmarks;
- Progression across levels should be a key feature;
- There should be synergy across programmes;
- Core texts and reading material should be developed and available in digitised format;
- Course teams to develop a suitable range of eLearning materials to be available to all aspects of our UG provision where relevant.

Conclusion

The title to this paper is a thinly veiled homage to the film trilogy 'The Matrix', but the opportunity offered the matrix used here gave us to review was priceless. From there we can start the process of re-ordering and regenerating our undergraduate provision post-2012.