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"We think that's the future": curriculum reform initiatives in higher education



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Foreword

How does a university go about successfully changing its curriculum? Curriculum and curriculum change are sensitive topics which can excite passionate debate – debate fuelled by considerations that may be political (the culture of a university), philosophical (the nature of the discipline), and educational (professional practice). In the current context of higher education with changes to funding regimes, pressures to identify and market distinctiveness, to provide value for money, to provide ever more flexible systems to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, and in some cases to meet exacting professional requirements, tackling whole institutional reform is not for the faint-hearted.

This new report by Ann Pegg, “*We think that’s the future: Curriculum reform initiatives in higher education*”, analyses the ingredients that make for a successful curriculum reform initiative. Blackmore and Kandiko, in *Strategic Curriculum Change in Universities: Global Trends* (Routledge, 2012) - have examined how research-intensive universities are adapting the curriculum for a global marketplace. Pegg focuses attention on reform initiatives in a large, urban, English university, a small specialist conservatoire in Scotland, and a very large Australian university. In so doing, she identifies the key ingredients in 'success' : pre-eminently the clarity and consistency of a vision commonly shared, the full engagement of staff and students in design and implementation, and the need for both short-term and long-term staff development - on programmes of initial teacher training and continuing professional development such as those accredited by the HEA .

What is often lacking however, the research shows, is a plan to evaluate the impact of the curriculum change; in other words, to build into the process the means by which one can measure the success or otherwise of a change process and to learn from it. The HEA specialises in devising change management courses which explore the whole process of significant educational transformation, from vision, through design and implementation, to impact assessment.

This timely research includes case studies from a diverse group of higher education institutions that help to illustrate what works in curriculum reform. I commend this report to you, and the change services offered by the Higher Education Academy, including our new series of change masterclasses. We look forward to continuing to work with the sector to make curriculum reform happen – for the sake of improving student outcomes and the student learning experience.

Professor Stephanie Marshall
Chief Executive
Higher Education Academy

December 2013

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This research would not have been possible without the generous contribution of all the staff and students at the case study universities. Seventy-eight people gave generously of their time and answered questions, described events, provided documents and made thoughtful reflective comments about their experiences in order to contribute to our understanding of the changing curriculum, in all its guises, within higher education institutions.

I would particularly like to thank Dr Clarissa Wilks at Kingston University, Professor Maggie Kinloch, Dr Celia Duffy, Suzanne Daly and Heather Black at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and Sonia Ferns at Curtin University, Australia, for facilitating my visits to each of their universities where I was welcomed warmly and introduced to a wide range of people.

I would also like to thank the seven interviewees from the 'wider group' of universities. These discussions added an important element of breadth to the research project.

As a 'lone researcher' this study would not have been possible without the excellent project management, logistic and administrative support provided by John Rose-Adams and Dawn Patton at The Open University, both of whom had a key role in organising and co-ordinating the research activities. Thanks are also due to Alwyn Fox for her timely and accurate transcriptions of the many recordings that were made.

The Steering Group offered valuable guidance and advice and included: Dr Geoff Stoakes (HEA), Dr Helen May (HEA), Rob Walton (HEA), Dr Fiona Reeve (The Open University), Dr Camille Kandiko (Kings College, London) and Dr John Butcher (The Open University).

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"We think that's the future": curriculum reform initiatives in higher education

Executive summary:

The research

- This research study was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy to explore the nature of whole institutional curriculum reform undertaken by universities¹ in the UK and beyond in response to the globalised world and global economy of the 21st century.
- The key questions addressed in this report explore:
 - what self-scrutiny, strategies, planning and processes do universities who have successfully reformed the curriculum undertake?
 - how do these universities measure and evaluate the impact of whole curriculum reform in relation to learning and teaching and the student experience?
- Eighteen universities expressed interest in the research and provided details of their reforms. Each university judged their reforms as successful against their own expectations. An initial in-depth interview took place with ten of these universities and follow-up case study research took place at three universities: Kingston University, London; Curtin University, Perth, Australia and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Findings

- The case study institutions, and the wider group of universities interviewed, were generally making changes that involved a tightening of the definition of their curricula offer in terms of making explicit links to the universities mission, business strategies and admission strategies; tightening the explicit links between learning outcomes, module design, assessment and the degree or qualification, often narrowing choice within degree pathways.
- There were variations in the ways that Universities dealt with this type of reform and, in particular, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Leeds University adopted an approach that contrasted with the general direction of travel in highlighting student autonomy and inter-disciplinarity in their approach to curriculum reform.
- Establishing timescales and models for project planning which included long timeframes for debate, engagement and the evaluation of the impact of reform for different cohorts of students was problematic – and there is a real possibility that estimating the true costs of a reform initiative in terms of time and resource at the 'vision' stage would result in universities inertia as the business risks would seem too great to support change.
- Organisational size was important. It influenced student and staff engagement strategies and the way that organisational structures could support the different organisational areas in maintaining the changes established through the reform initiative.

¹ Although HEI or HEP would be the more recognised terms in the UK it was felt that for the international nature of the study the more broadly recognised term 'university' would be used throughout.

Supporting success – indicators from the case studies

- Successful curriculum reform was supported by participative leadership at all levels within the organisation and facilitation of student engagement through all the different phases of the curriculum reform initiatives.
- Staff and student involvement in agreeing the approach to implementation for the new curriculum was crucial and, potentially, mitigated the risks of reputational harm during the implementation period.
- Successful initiatives were implemented with a variety of short and longer-term staff development activities that supported staff in enhancing student learning through better knowledge of curriculum design.
- Group approaches to staff development seem to have been particularly effective in developing staff confidence in new curriculum design, which in turn conveyed confidence in the curriculum to the students.

The difficult distinction between institutional change and curriculum reform

- Detailed thinking about learning and teaching often happened after the leadership vision for the institution had been agreed and communicated to staff and students.
- Universities setting out on the road to reform were not always aware of all the long term activities that might be involved in a whole institutional reform process.
- Few participants discussed particular theories, perspectives or models of organisational change, and few of the Universities had set in place evaluation models at the start of the initiatives.
- The ending of reform projects needed to be clearly thought through. In particular, where resources/staff were withdrawn at the end of the project the way that reduced resource would support any teams and committees continuing with curriculum review and developmental work needed to be discussed.
- Evaluation of the curriculum reform initiatives was problematic; there were difficulties in relation to the timescale of these projects and in the complex ways in which these changes related to the student experience and their achievements. How change could be captured through data, and how value could be attributed to these changes, were difficult questions that were not always explicitly addressed.
- The potential use of an evaluation is also an issue. The initiatives in these case studies related to leadership vision for the whole institution, but the activities and resulting changes influenced specific activities and practices for those working within particular areas (curriculum and teaching) rather than the whole institution.

Recommendations/discussion points for institutions

Shaping curriculum reform initiatives:

Recommendation 1: A vision for change needs to be broadly shared and anchored in the teaching and mission of an institution and an agreed approach for the delivery of a quality student experience.

Recommendation 2: The shared vision should be drawn from a considered review of the external and internal context and elucidate a clear purpose to curriculum reform.

Recommendation 3: The intended outcomes of change need to be clearly articulated in relation to the institutional philosophy and approach to learning and teaching.

Engagement and implementation:

Recommendation 4: Student engagement and involvement at all levels, and through all phases, enhances the process of curriculum reform and can have positive benefits at the implementation phase.

Recommendation 5: Staff and student involvement in agreeing the approach to implementation for the new curriculum is important and has the potential to mitigate the risks of reputational harm during the implementation period.

Recommendation 6: Cross-institutional communities of practice focused on specific disciplines, teaching and increasingly employability offer crucial insights into their areas of practice and should be actively engaged in the change process at the start of the discussions.

Recommendation 7: Short and longer-term staff development activities that enhance student learning through better knowledge of curriculum design are required to develop staff confidence and capability. Programmes such as the PG Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and HEA accreditation could explicitly connect to, and support reform initiatives.

Evaluation and sustainability:

Recommendation 8: Early on, change leaders need to consider the issues of evaluation (process and outcomes) and to put in place an evaluation plan (not just plan an evaluation).

Recommendation 9: The inclusive consultation processes should be reflected in inclusive evaluation plans which capture the views of all stakeholders (academic staff, students, employers, professional bodies).

Recommendation 10: Reform initiatives need to provide a curriculum architecture, learning and teaching philosophy and disciplinary review process that can sustain flexibility in response to future requirements for institutional change and continual development in response to the external environment.

This research study took a reflective case study approach to researching whole institutional curriculum reform, interviewing people who had recently been involved. The impact of this activity for staff and students was difficult to assess and, in some cases, not yet apparent. Research into curriculum reform in higher education institutions would benefit from a variety of longitudinal research approaches to explore how this type of change can best be evidenced and researched. Two potential research approaches are suggested and discussed at the end of this report.

Recommendations for further research

Recommendation 11: To explore whether the university offer is becoming more homogenous as the curriculum becomes more closely aligned with a global economy.

Recommendation 12: In order to assess changes in the curriculum offer over time a longitudinal study is required.

Introduction

This research study was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy to explore the nature of whole institutional curriculum reform undertaken by Universities in the UK and beyond in response to the globalised world and global economy of the 21st century. Rather than undertaking a general review of international higher education provision, the research focussed on identifying the organisational extent of institutional curriculum reform programmes; their impact on staff and students and how these reform initiatives became embedded in the day-to-day workings of the universities involved. The key questions addressed in this report explore:




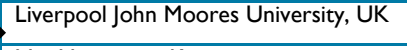



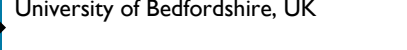
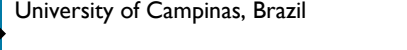

- What self-scrutiny, strategies, planning and processes do Universities who have successfully reformed the curriculum undertake?
- How do these universities measure and evaluate the impact of whole curriculum reform in relation to learning and teaching and the student experience?

The time, resources, commitment and impact on business required by significant curriculum reform initiatives undertaken by universities is considerable – the reputational risks for universities with incomplete, stalled or unsuccessful initiatives are high. With this in mind this research sought examples of successful curriculum reform, with the measure of success being judged by the institutions themselves. Through an open invitation 18 Universities expressed interest in the research and provided details of their reforms. An initial in-depth interview took place with ten of these universities and follow-up case study research took place at three universities: Kingston University, London; Curtin University, Perth, Australia and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Taking this funnelling approach to the selection of the institutions meant that cases were chosen for follow up that illustrated particular aspects of the institutional curriculum reform processes that had taken place. Using a qualitative case study approach the research investigated the experiences and views of students, academics, supporting professional staff and senior leaders. The fieldwork visits generated a detailed and in-depth picture of the reform initiatives within each institution which informed the analysis. Interviews, group discussions, documentary evidence and observations of meetings directly involved 78 people from the three institutions. The case study data, together with the seven interviews from the initial respondents (referred to in this report as the 'wider group') form the basis of this research commentary. Figure 1 provides details of the participating institutions and a more detailed outline of the research method can be found in Appendix A.

The report begins with an introduction which considers the research challenge in attempting to pinpoint the nature of whole institutional curriculum reform for Universities in the 21st century. In Section 2 the case study data and wider group interviews illustrate some of the key aspects of universities curriculum reform initiatives identified in this research study. Leadership, vision, the engagement and development of staff, timescales, implementation strategies, evaluation and the move to 'business as usual' were all features of curriculum reform initiatives which played out in different ways for these universities. With few exceptions, the overall direction of these reform initiatives was towards a leaner, more centrally-led organisation focussed on efficiency in delivery of higher education to students. The report concludes with a discussion of the key points emerging from the research and recommendations for institutions and staff engaging in this type of initiative.

Figure 1: Participating institutions.

Initial responses (Responded to open call for evidence)	Wider group (Participated in in-depth interview)	Case studies (Institutional visits and discussions with a range of staff and students)
		Curtin University, Perth, Australia
		Kingston University, UK
		The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
		Liverpool John Moores University, UK
		Moi University, Kenya
		University of Leeds, UK
		University of the West of Scotland
		University of Bedfordshire, UK
		University of Campinas, Brazil
		University of Hull, UK
University of Montreal, Canada		
University of Brighton, UK		
Middlesex University, UK		
University Campus Suffolk, UK		
University of Karachi, Pakistan		
University of Southampton, UK		
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK		
Kenyatta University, Kenya		

Section 1: Investigating institutional curriculum change

This research has at its origins the simple premise that people create change – individually, collaboratively and organisationally. Organisations are created by individuals and institutions are organisations that have developed a recognisable place in society through their history, structures, cultures, myths and discourses that the individuals within them both embrace, challenge and change as they participate in established and new organisational practices (Gheradi 2006; Trowler 2001). Universities are an institutional organisational form that is long established with a history to the discourse taking place both within and outside the university, and it is important that any discussion of curriculum reform takes note of the impact of these influences on current initiatives.

Barnett (2011) traces the 1,000 year history of the university and argues that ‘the forms of the university do not give way so easily as the ideas: a modern university is, at any one time, a layering of forms, as the new settle, uneasily at times, over the earlier incarnations’ (2011, p.453). He goes on to suggest that current ideas about universities are complex and many layered, and that the current foregrounding of the ‘entrepreneurial’ university gels with understandings of the importance of the knowledge economy as a global phenomenon, and a rapid pace of change as a feature of globalisation. Caution needs to be used here as this may be a westernised notion of the impact of global forces on university forms, as the role of different histories and the different influences of the nation state are significant in many areas of the globe (for example in Africa, China and India).

A discourse of challenge and change in the literature relating to higher education has been apparent for some time, both for the UK and globally. Across these debates concerning the future of higher education there is an emphasis on universities as organisations that are in a phase of transformation. This transformation is identified as requiring a reshaping of the curriculum to be delivered by universities and the creation of new forms for the university, with new modes of teaching, learning and assessment. Standaert (2012) suggests that we are entering a second paradigm shift in the history of the university – the first being from the renaissance to modernity, a shift that took place over a period of 200 years. Given the long timeframe required for evidence of change to become visible, curriculum change and university forms in the present could therefore be understood as diverse and emergent. As new forms are created, older forms and curricula are refined and new practices taken up – some of which may be later put aside. To develop this evolutionary metaphor, which forms best fit with future social, economic and political economies and will survive to form any new paradigm, is as yet unclear.

These debates indicate that curriculum reform is a highly contested field, politically, philosophically and in educational practice. When examining institutional curriculum reform it is important to separate out the ‘*what is*’, to identify how and in what way the curriculum is changing for students, from the ‘*what should be*’, within this rhetoric of change. Position statements, future scanning and manifestos for action² are, in themselves, insufficient to evidence curriculum change at the point of delivery and its impact upon students. These views are, however, important. The notion of ‘reform’ in itself alludes to an improvement or change with a particular direction or intention and the ideals and philosophy shaping any reform are significant in considering responses to the various drivers for change. Curriculum reform is therefore directional, taking place within a specific context, and is politically and philosophically influenced within the social practices of a university. Capturing and conceptualising curriculum reform activities is therefore a particular challenge as, in practice, it may always be an emergent phenomena, most visible in the longer term through the lens of history.

² See for example <http://curriculumreform.org/curriculum-reform-manifesto>

The 21st-century economy and the call for reform

It has become a rhetorical commonplace to describe the current situation for UK and global higher education institutions (universities) as one of rapid change in response to the demands of a global knowledge economy. However, evidence of specific, long-term changes in the higher education curriculum, and the impact of these changes for students is harder to find (Vidovich et al 2012). Within the UK, universities are currently responding to new national funding regimes. Globally, universities are also subject to national initiatives and are responding to perceptions of the changes required by a new global economy in education. This may result in new forms of institution, for example, the *transnational* university such as the new University College formed through a partnership between Yale and the National University Singapore (2013) and the *federated* form as illustrated by the universities participating in new arrangements for MOOCs (massive open online courses) such as the UK Futurelearn initiative, or Coursera and EdX in the United States.

However, notions of a knowledge economy are contested. Lauder et al (2012) point out that understandings of global change, economic demands and other key issues may look very different from the perspective of those in economies that are continuing to expand and develop such as China, India and South America, and indeed, the national plans for higher education expansion in these areas support that view and clearly evidence concerns with positioning these growing nations within a new global economy³. The notion of globalisation is also a contested concept that requires interrogation and development (Vidovich et al 2012), particularly when applied to a group of institutions such as universities which are far from homogenous.

While it may be true that global, national and regional government policy perspectives in relation to drivers for change shape university ambitions at a local level, care should be taken to avoid adopting an uncritical and westernised perspective in relation to these higher education agendas. There are significant differences in perspective, and in responses to these perceived global drivers, from different local, regional and national viewpoints. Khelifaoui (2009) discusses the Bologna Process and colonialism in Africa, MOI University in Kenya is developing courses in Swahili for neighbouring African Nations, and Zhang (2012) observes that reforms of the curriculum which include general and inter-disciplinary education are difficult to achieve within the state drivers and culture of Chinese higher education.

It may be the case that the research-intensive universities studied by Blackmore and Kandiko (2012) and Vidovich et al (2012) are already positioning themselves within a global research arena. Global flows of people (researchers) and research ideas work across these leading institutions. This, together with universities with international hubs and transnational partnerships, may lead to changes to the teaching curriculum for these institutions. However, the extent to which these global research networks and relationships impact upon curriculum changes and whether these changes could be described as curriculum reform or a continuing responsiveness to developments in knowledge is uncertain and requires further investigation (Van Noorden 2012; Kim and Locke 2010). For many universities outside these specific global research networks the relationship between knowledge and teaching takes on a different character related to local and national and professional networks, subject to different cultural influences. The idea that there may be some global stratification evident in the way in which any new university forms are developing, and the ways this may impact upon different curricula offers, is worthy of future exploration.

³ Higher education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) and beyond; China's national plan for medium and long-term education reform and development (2010-2020); Africa Union workshop on establishment of a continental accreditation agency for Higher Education in Africa communique 10–11 April 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Conceptualising global university change – policy borrowing and academic drift

While new forms for organisational delivery do not necessarily indicate a new curriculum, the two may be connected. Vidovich et al (2012) suggest there are three types of possible curriculum reform:

- the move to an internationalised, integrated and inter-disciplinary curriculum, with professional recognition occurring at postgraduate education stage;
- a move to a 'common-core' curriculum of general education alongside the specialist and professional curriculum at undergraduate level;
- the introduction of 'hub-and-spoke' type university curriculum, where universities deliver a general/liberal arts curricula from a university abroad, or deliver their own curriculum abroad.

However, they acknowledge there is insufficient evidence available to confirm this as many institutions are still in the process of reform, proposing the generation of a 'global' case study to test this thesis.

Blackmore and Kandiko (2012) take a different approach to conceptualising curriculum change and focus on the networked social processes involved in the activity of curriculum change: the policies, purposes, organisational processes and outcomes as identified by those involved in change activities. As noted above, it can be difficult to tease out the difference between major curriculum change and the continuous and on-going activities that take place as part of the development of knowledge and teaching practices within a university. Discussions about globalisation and the knowledge economy may take place within this pattern of continuous

development rather than being a specific driver for reform. This resonates with the organisational perspective of Edmondson and Moingeon (1999) who suggest that organisational change 'requires considerable self-scrutiny and effort' (p.157) and that it is this social activity which allows us to gather empirical evidence about the nature of change, and the extent of reform, within these organisations.

Two key concepts have been used to examine change in universities: *policy borrowing* and *academic drift*. Phillips and Ochs (2003) identify four stages in *policy borrowing*, briefly summarised as:

- attraction;
- decision;
- implementation;
- internalisation.

While Phillips and Ochs take a 'big picture' approach to national education it is worth exploring how these concepts work at an institutional level and how the social practice of curriculum design may relate to these stages when reforms are being considered. Within the wider group of universities in this research there were clear indications of 'attraction' and 'internalisation' in moving higher education policy and curricula expertise from one nation to another across the global arena; Kenya looking to Norway and Europe; UK institutions looking to Australia; and Brazil looking to Europe and the US for widening access policies.

Policy and political assumptions, closely connected to the concept of policy borrowing, are evident in approaches that seek to influence change in universities through the study of leading global and innovative institutions. These assumptions tend to conflate notions of policy borrowing with those of 'academic drift', and both concepts offer different approaches to understanding institutional change. Academic drift is the tendency of higher educational institutions to rapidly adopt disciplinary or 'programme specific' innovations and organisational structures, leading to increasing homogeneity across institutions (Morphew 2009). This may be viewed as a desirable tendency by policy makers and professional bodies where consistency of the higher education curriculum across a range of diverse institutions is required to ensure standards and to drive forward new initiatives.

Underpinning notions of academic drift are assumptions about the way that higher education institutions respond to environmental changes (eg a competitive funding regime, a global knowledge economy) and, consequently make changes to their institutional and curricula offer.

Morphew's analysis of institutional diversity in US universities suggests that such isomorphism in the face of global change is not the case. Morphew suggests that where institutions are well established, they are required to balance internal pressures (faculty views, history of the university) and external pressures (student numbers, funding changes, global competition) for change. This requirement for balance means that established universities are 'prone to incremental change, even faced with change in their environments that is not incremental at all' (Morphew 2009, p.263). Newer, for-profit organisations, on the other hand, were less institutionalised, developed new courses centrally and were therefore more responsive to external pressures for change and more susceptible to academic drift.

This would suggest that newer universities and those with greater financial pressures and financial freedom would be most likely to undertake curriculum reform in response to global or policy pressures. However, De Jager (2011) suggests that there is an alternative possibility for non-research-intensive universities, 'a dominant drive to build a unique brand' rather than to emulate higher status institutions or succumb to academic drift. This view is supported by Kissell (2011) and Mirabella and Balkun (2011) who document this clearly when they reflect on the importance of a Catholic identity and the reflection of a Catholic world view in the discussions and agreements during the curriculum reform taking place at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, US.

The early findings in this research suggest that the nature of curriculum reform may be dependent upon how an individual university places itself both geographically and in relation to other universities in terms of ranking and primary activity. Some interesting geographical influences were reported that challenged the policy assumptions about academic drift as a driver for curriculum change and, while there were indications of movement by individual universities in each of the areas identified by Vidovich et al (2012), the focus of the effort in the area of curriculum reform was more closely aligned to forming a coherent institutional mission. The individuals involved in curriculum reform at institutional level had, where possible, taken the opportunities to revisit their underpinning philosophy for education and made efforts to ensure that this was reflected within the reform process taking place. Further research is needed in this area to add to the global case study proposed by Vidovich et al and to add detail to our knowledge about institutional-level curriculum design which will shape learning for students in the future.

What is being reformed?

In considering the definition of whole institutional curriculum reform it is important to emphasise the necessarily integrated relationship between the institution and the curriculum offer – the institution would not exist without a curriculum, and any institutional change may have an impact on the curriculum, even if unintended. Furthermore, the range of possible conceptions of curriculum is extensive and could include the planned or designed curriculum, the marketed curriculum, the taught curriculum, the student experience (both formal and informal) and, increasingly in the UK, the co-curricula offer validated by the university through the Higher Education Achievement Report (Barnett et al 2001; Bernstein 1999; Billett 2006; Blackmore and Kandiko 2012; Hicks 2007; UUK 2007). Many of the reform initiatives taking place in the responding universities included a number of these elements of 'curriculum' within their change activities, whether they were instigated from the 'center', in what Trowler (2001) might characterise as the move to a 'new higher education' and managerialist approach, or where they were developed at the faculty-level and grew from 'bottom-up' initiatives to improve learning and teaching such as those described by the University of West of Scotland.

In order to capture the complex and many faceted elements inherent in the term curriculum the concepts of architecture (Wenger 1998; Boyd et al 2007), content and learning and teaching are useful to think through three related groups of activity: those relating to the **architecture** of the curriculum (the portfolio offer, the size and shape of modules, semesterisation, and the length and shape of the academic year) which were necessarily entangled with the **content** of the curriculum (disciplinary content, generic content, and development of employability/entrepreneurship skills) and, thirdly, approaches to **learning and teaching** (pedagogy, lecturing, group work, tutorial approaches, examination and assessment practices, and validation of co-curricular learning). To develop understanding of these interconnections a framework of dimensions of curriculum and the direction of travel for reform initiatives at the individual universities was developed and used as an analytic tool to develop thinking about the reforms taking place.

Curriculum dimensions and the direction of travel

Curricula change as experienced by the student can take time to emerge, being built upon a previous curriculum and implemented for differing cohorts of students. The King's-Warwick research (2010) suggests this type of institutional change takes three to five years to achieve and requires 'supportive and consistent leadership' (p.16). The report of Seton Hall's reforms (US) by Mirabella and Balkun (2011) describes a ten-year timescale to both design and embed reform where gaining the support of all academics is essential in making changes to both the structure and content of the curriculum. The case studies in this report reflect upon reform initiatives taking place over 18 months to nine years.

Key issues here are the approach to introducing the planned curriculum reforms undertaken by universities; the speed of change and the extent of change. A 'schism' or 'big bang' approach as illustrated by the case studies from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Kingston University, London, involved an explicit decision to change the curriculum (and therefore the university experience) for both new and current students. The alternative is an 'emergent' or 'incremental' approach rolled out over time through a gradual change to the curricula offer to each cohort of students through individual departments or faculties, the approach used at Curtin University, Australia, over a three-year period. This second approach means that an institution is running two parallel curricula, and new and continuing students may view their different study experiences as different in quality. The way in which curriculum change is communicated to students therefore becomes highly significant (Itaki 2007) and there are implications for staff and students, and risks for the organisation, associated with each of these approaches.

The study of curriculum reform at an institutional level is challenging. In this study the multiple and various elements of curriculum reform identified through considering the activities related to the architecture, content discussions and learning and teaching aspects of the emerging new curricula were understood as elements within three key dimensions:

- organisational issues;
- learning and teaching practices;
- the student experience.

These key areas of focus were developed from a review of relevant literature and checked for coverage during the initial responses that were received from universities at the start of the research. This is not to suggest that the curriculum can be easily stratified in this way – the various elements within the dimensions, and activity across dimensions merged and combined in different ways to form a whole curriculum for each institution, and, like the colouring of a marble, the intensity and visibility of the different elements varied across and within each institution in complex ways.

Therefore the speed, direction and distance of travel relating to each specific element within the whole institutional curriculum reform initiative varied. For example, Kingston University sought to maintain a balance of local and international students and to maintain its student numbers, but applied reforms to change the organisational approach to the entry offer. This would support the curriculum reform focus on retention, progression and success for students. The distance and direction of travel across the three dimensions of organisation, learning and teaching and the student experience (and the various elements within them) provide an overall indication of the distance of travel undertaken for each of the case study institutions, and is illustrated diagrammatically in Section 2.

Overall the case study institutions, and the wider group of universities interviewed within this study, were generally moving in the direction that tightened the definition of their curricula offer in terms of explicit links to the university mission, business strategies and admission strategies; tightening the explicit links between learning outcomes, module design, assessment and the degree or qualification, often narrowing choice within degree pathways. There were variations within this in the ways that universities dealt with this type of reform and, in particular, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Leeds University adopted an approach that contrasted with the general direction of travel in highlighting student autonomy and an inter-disciplinary approach to curriculum reform.

Section 2: Themes from the research

How the case studies and wider group interviews are used in this report

In presenting the findings the wider group interviews and the case studies are used to illustrate particular aspects of the ways in which these organisations undertook reform. Although the context, size and nature of each institution differed, each institution had, in their own terms, successfully completed a whole institutional reform initiative that had significance for staff and students. The thematic issues that emerged from the rich descriptions which were generated through interviews with staff and students were shared across all the institutions that participated in the research, albeit with a different emphasis in the different cases.

Section 2 begins with a brief overview of each case study institution, the reform initiative that took place and the key features that have been drawn out to illustrate the research. A diagrammatic representation of the extent of change across these features is provided for each case study institution. The body of the research report is structured around the themes which emerged and each theme is illustrated by the material generated by the individual case studies in different ways. In order to achieve depth in the report the three universities are not compared within each section, but used to illustrate the significant issues being discussed:

Theme 1 – Leadership, vision and engagement draws primarily from the case studies of Kingston University, London, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Theme 2 – Timescales, decision making and staff development draws from the interviews with the wider group of universities and from all three case study universities.

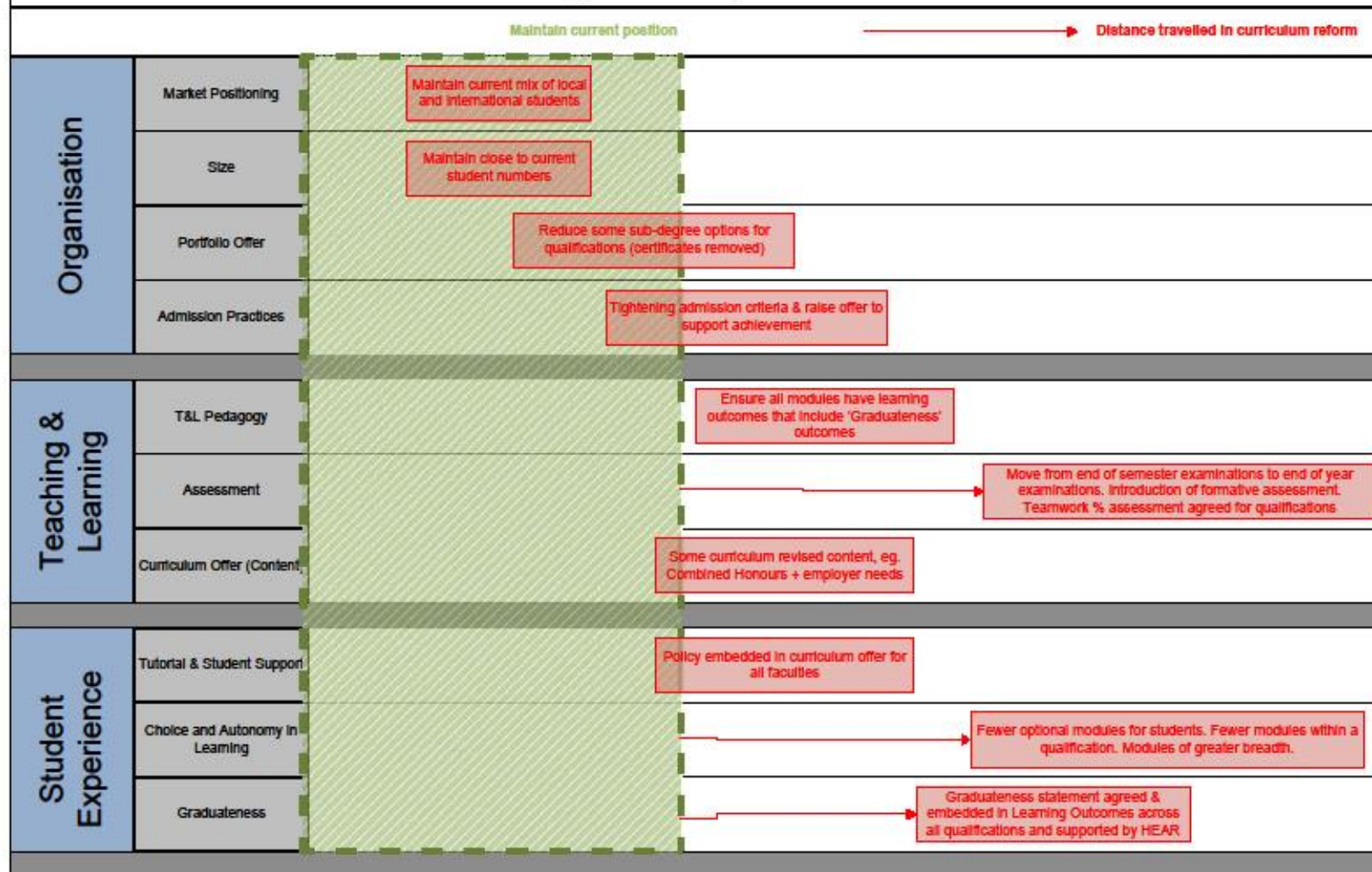
Theme 3 - Ending initiatives, evaluation and continuing curriculum development draws primarily from the case studies of Curtin University, Australia, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

The case study institutions

Kingston University, London

The institution:	Kingston University was established in 1899 as a technical institute and gained university status in 1992. It has 23,105 students and 2,916 staff (799 of which are sessional staff).
The reform initiative:	The curriculum reform project worked to create and implement a revised academic framework (RAF) across five faculties and included all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The extent of the reform included a move from 15 to 30 credit modules for all, the reorganisation of the academic year, the reduction of examinations from twice yearly to once yearly, the implementation of a policy and system for personal tutoring, the embedding of an employability strand within all courses, new assessment and feedback practices, the integration of academic skills and e-learning strategies and the introduction of capstone projects for all final-year UG courses.
Drivers for reform:	The impact of the new UK funding regime; concerns about retention of students and their progression and completion of degrees; desire to improve NSS responses in a number of areas.
The project team	One senior academic lead appointed from within the institution for two years with administrative support. The overall project team was composed of a wide cross-section of senior staff from Faculty, Students Support Services, Registry and the Student Union.
Implementation:	The new curriculum began in September 2013 for all students. Adoption of a 'big bang' approach.
Learning from the initiative:	teamworking, value of focus on students' experience, benefits of using a wide range of people (internal and external) to contribute to curriculum design.
Key features:	Leadership and vision, student involvement; designing the supportive architecture for the curriculum change programme; support for redesign process.

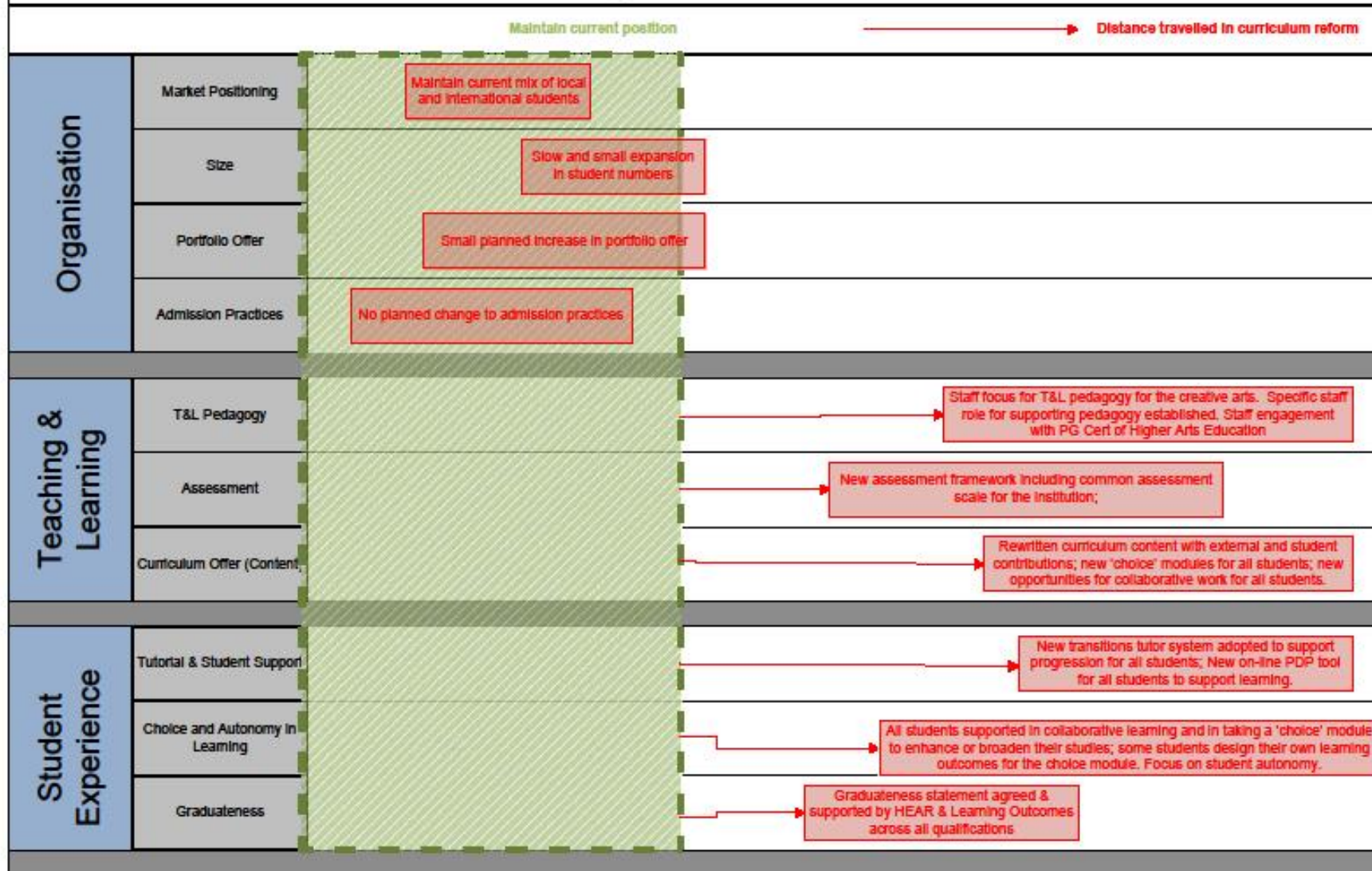
Dimensions of Reform + Distance Travelled / Kingston University



The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

The institution:	Established in 1847 and awarded its own degree awarding powers in 1993 (prior to this via Glasgow University). It has 850 students, 257 full-time staff and 496 part-time/sessional staff.
The reform initiative:	The Conservatoire began its curriculum reform programme with nine programmes in two schools and included only undergraduate programmes within the review. The extent of the reform included almost all aspects of organisational operation. The redesign of the academic year, the introduction of new assessment scales, the introduction of new collaborative practice and 'choice' modules for all students, new tutor roles (Transitions Tutors) and new committee structures and e-learning support for these curriculum changes.
The project team(s):	One senior academic lead appointed from within the institution for two years with administrative support. A variety of project teams for different stages drawn from staff, students, alumni and external contacts (Stage 1 the students' experience, the external context and academic processes – Stage 2 learning design teams). The overall steering group also made use of an external scrutiny group.
Implementation:	The new curriculum began for the majority of new and existing students in September 2012. Adoption of a 'big bang' approach.
Learning from the initiative:	The value of including students and external commentary in the curriculum reform process, the detailed consideration of how feedback and measurement tools can be used to helpfully support continued development. The value of a 'cohort' approach to staff development activities.
Key features:	Leadership and staff involvement; student involvement; connections to ideas about 21 st -century working environment; student choice and autonomy, managing implementation and subsequent measurement of implementation; facilitating staff and student engagement in designing learning for the 21 st century.

Dimensions of Reform + Distance Travelled / The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland



Curtin University, Perth, Australia

The institution:	Established as Perth Technical school in 1900; became Curtin University of Technology in 1987 and changed its name to Curtin University in 2010. It has 47,164 students and 3,142 staff across four faculties and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies.
The reform initiative:	Curtin completed a major three-year curriculum reform programme - Curriculum 2010 - in December 2009 after which time the processes and practices were embedded into business as usual. Curtin is about to conduct a second major reform programme – Transforming Learning at Curtin. There are many components of this programme but one of the key strategies is the Assessment, Review, Transformation (ART 2015) project, which is building on the processes established through the Curriculum 2010 project. ART includes all undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees
The project team(s):	Led through the Office of Teaching and Learning C2010; drew on a range of internal staff. A team of six staff remain post project to manage the courses review process.
Implementation:	The 2010 curriculum was established between 2008 and 2010 for all students (rolled out as courses were reviewed and approved over the three years of the project). The new project will also roll out changes over a three-year period.
Learning from the initiative:	The move from a unit focus to a whole-course focus for review, the value of the needs analysis tool (views from students, graduates, employers and industry experts), the value of a coherent and consistent approach across the whole university.
Key features:	Introduction of a sustainable Comprehensive Curriculum Review process which focused on learning outcomes which aligned to Curtin's Graduate Attributes; support for learning design for academics through Learning and Teaching. Evaluation of process and embedding student feedback tools. The move to business as usual, embedding curriculum change and the decision to review/transform again.

Dimensions of Reform + Distance Travelled / Curtin University, Australia (Curriculum 2010)

		Maintain current position	Distance travelled in curriculum reform
Organisation	Market Positioning		Excellent and sustainable Degree programmes. Improved market position
	Size		Increase numbers of home and International students
	Portfolio Offer		Small planned increase in portfolio offer – renewal of current offer to new quality standards
	Admission Practices		No planned change to admission practices
Teaching & Learning	T&L Pedagogy		Staff focus on review of curriculum to ensure that learning outcomes aligned to Curtin's Graduate Attributes. Specific curriculum review tools developed and teaching and learning support for review established.
	Assessment		Review of assessment practices to ensure alignment with learning outcomes.
	Curriculum Offer (Content)		Comprehensive review includes employer, student, and graduate surveys. Some curriculum content rewritten following review and external scoping, revised modules within the programme, removal of modules and qualifications no longer actively being delivered.
Student Experience	Tutorial & Student Support		Tutorial system outside the scope of C2010.
	Choice and Autonomy in Learning		Student choices and options vary according to qualification and extent of choice and range of modules agreed by the course team at Comprehensive Course Review. All students now offered an opportunity through on-line survey to feedback experience at the module level to the course teams.
	Graduateness		Graduateness statement agreed prior to this Initiative – Comprehensive Course Review embeds this within Learning Outcomes across all qualifications

Theme 1: Leadership, vision and engagement

The structure of the reform process took a similar shape at each of the case study institutions, essentially a three-phase approach consisting of:

- Phase 1: initiation, consultation and agreement on the *architecture* to be put in place for the curriculum reform initiative;
- Phase 2: the redesign and revalidation process;
- Phase 3: *implementation* and the move to a new ‘business as usual’ for the curriculum in terms of teaching, learning and administration.

Evaluation of each institutional reform initiative was usually approached at, or after, the end of the Implementation phase, although there were key reporting points where academic boards, or institutional committees formally agreed key decisions, for example relating to architecture and re-validation. These decision points did not usually contain evaluation of the curriculum reform initiatives as a whole, but a notable exception to this was the detailed reflective review produced at each stage of project by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Evaluation is discussed in further detail in Theme 3.

This three-phase overall approach to curricula reform was also identified within the wider group of universities, but it is important to note that participants described a *process* rather than a project methodology as identified within project management and the organisational change literature. For some universities this process worked in an iterative manner, with phases overlapping and decisions revisited at later points.

“When you ask about a methodology we don’t use, you know, PRINCE2 [...] we have our own university methodology rather than going down the route of quite restrictive processes. Because even though we’ve tried out that type of working before our academics just haven’t bought into it. And it can sometimes be seen to be quite rigid in terms of ways of working.” (Project Manager, Leeds University.)

The overall shape of the initiatives and key decision points are discussed in more detail later in the report, but for every reform the starting point was the ability of senior leaders to develop and communicate their vision for the future. More broadly, leaders aimed to develop a shared mission for the university to be taken up and supported by the people within each institution. This is not to indicate that these ideas are taken up uncritically, as organisational discourses are complex and dialogic. Marshak and Grant (2008) show how the relationship between organisational discourse and organisational development is a complex one. The proposed concepts of change, in this case the various components of each leadership vision, move to become discursive objects, where the impact upon individual social action is discussed and contested at various organisational levels, as these new concepts and associated changes relate directly to the work activities of individuals.

Therefore, in a very concrete way, leadership vision ties the curriculum change initiative to the strategic aims of an institution and has a powerful effect on the parameters for curriculum reform initiatives. Moore and Diamond discussing academic leadership argue that: “Successful leadership requires that there be a vision. Turning an institutional vision into reality requires shared commitment and teamwork. Shared commitment and teamwork are what strategic planning processes are all about.” (2000, p.74). Nicol and Draper (2009) broadly support this when suggesting that transformational change in universities requires ‘a long-range and worthwhile educational aspiration that is grander than the goals of the project itself and that is related to the strategy’ (p.204). McNutt (2012) also discusses this alignment between curriculum reform and strategic planning, and expresses concerns that curriculum reform initiatives risk prioritising managerial objectives over learner interests as academics have sometimes been reluctant to engage in institutional strategic discussions. For the case study universities and the wider interview group universities in this research, academics and academic leaders were central to the reform initiatives, both in the discussions about reform and in the implementation of change.

Differences in the ways in which individual leaders develop and share their vision is an aspect of leadership which has been the focus of far less research at the level of university leadership than that of school leadership, where perhaps individual leaders have more power and authority over the institution that they seek to transform. Nicol and Draper

(2009) identify the institutional structure of universities as a particular barrier to whole institutional reform due to the devolved power of faculty academics and faculty leadership. What academic leadership means in practice at multiple levels within universities as organisations has been explored elsewhere, but within the education and organisational research literature, leadership vision and shared vision at all levels of leadership within an institution is a feature consistently identified as supporting whole institutional change. This research identified different features of both leadership style and vision within two of the case studies which resulted in different trajectories for action within the curriculum reform initiatives that would follow.

A long-held vision – the DVC and the senior staff (Kingston)

“We wanted to refresh everything. Sometimes the only way to do that is to have a big trigger and say “we’re going to review it all” rather than piecemeal which can take time, often doesn’t happen, and often isn’t joined up.”

Following a number of senior staff changes an idea that had been ‘knocking around’ for approximately two years solidified for the DVC together with a group of senior staff who had been concerned about a lack of coherence within the existing curriculum design principles, the falling position in the NSS league tables, the issues of progression, diversity and achievement, the need to support academic innovation and a growing awareness that there were multiple areas within the university that needed review.

“My vision was that we would have students getting more involved in their subject. That formative assessment would be increased. A personal tutoring system where the students know there is someone they can go to for help and receive a welcome reception. An environment where there is more time for students to do mini-work placements. That all sounds very utopian, I know – I knew that there would be issues along the way, as I’ve said, I knew that we would probably have fewer courses. I knew that we would probably have less optionality within those courses.”

“That’s where I wanted to go from where we were, which seemed to be a very labour intensive and complex system that wasn’t always delivering what was promised to the students. And as a by-product, because it was university wide and would have certain guidelines and principles and some things mandated, it would make sure we were spreading good practice across the university.” (*Deputy Vice Chancellor, Kingston University.*)

This vision shared with the Vice Chancellor, Senior Registrar, Deans and Associate Deans, resulted in an outline paper agreed at senior management level to endorse and fund the Revised Academic Framework (RAF) project; consulting on, designing and embedding whole institutional curriculum reform over the two-year period, 2011 to 2013, with intake on the new curriculum from Autumn 2013 onwards. This specific timescale dovetailed the RAF project with other planned institutional changes (the Strategic Plan and the Timetabling and Space Management project) to create a changed student experience. Two clear parameters were set; the need to move to a system based on larger, 30 credit modules and the need to hold examinations at the end of the year rather than during a mid-year break. The project would be led by a senior academic and the project board, and project teams would include students, academics from all faculties, academic registry and other key staff.

The leadership at Kingston was identified by academic staff as ‘strong’ and ‘leading from the front’. In contrast, at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland the leadership vision was more broadly described and the development of the vision was opened out to a wide constituency of staff and students as it emerged from the Principal’s notion of one institutional identity ‘the Conservatoire’ bringing together the two main schools of Music and Drama and a desire to connect more closely with the industry.

“We wanted to make sure that we had designed a curriculum that allowed students to be just as excellent as ever they were within their own discipline, but who also could work in inter-disciplinary ways, because that’s what the contemporary industry requires. (Vice Principal, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.)

The leadership here could be described as ‘democratic’ in approach. The whole institution participated in an ‘Open Space’ session in December 2008, described below, which resulted in the setting up of the Curriculum Reform Project in May 2009. Many staff members recalled during interviews that ‘anything’ was up for discussion about the future of the

organisation. A new Academic Framework was agreed in September 2011 and revisions to the curriculum were completed by September 2012 when a new cohort of students, and many continuing students, transferred to the new Academic Framework and revised curriculum offer⁴.

The Open Space session – creating a vision for the future at the Conservatoire

“We were there, we participated but we weren’t in leadership roles. We just engaged in the process with all of our colleagues.” (*Vice Principal, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.*)

The initial Open Space meeting was led by a group brought in to facilitate the day and presented to staff as a ‘once in a generational opportunity’ to reform the curriculum and shape the future of the Conservatoire. The idea was that this would be a ‘bottom-up’ and not ‘top-down’ reform, although the need for reform and to move the institution forwards to the ‘21st century’ had already been established, the parameters of reform, and what that might look like had not.

“It began with the ‘Open Space’ meeting. Which was important ideologically because it allowed voices from every sector of the institution to be heard. This was intended to be, and received as, a hugely democratic process. One staff member described it as an ‘anti-conference’.

“It’s a kind of anti-conference notion that the agenda that emerges are the burning issues of the people that are in the room, and those are the agendas that are pursued throughout the day. You kind of vote with your feet; you go and listen to where it’s most interesting, participate where it’s most interesting, and move on when it gets dull. There were students involved in that, all full-time members of staff, part-time members of staff; it was a completely open invitation, and it was really well attended.” (*Staff group 1, the Conservatoire.*)

Open Space is described as being an approach that is most distinctive for its initial lack of an agenda, which sets the stage for the meeting’s participants to create the agenda for themselves:

- a broad, open invitation that articulates the purpose of the meeting;
- a ‘bulletin board’ of issues and opportunities posted by participants;
- a ‘marketplace’ with many breakout spaces that participants move freely between, learning and contributing as they ‘shop’ for information and ideas;
- a ‘breathing’ or ‘pulsation’ pattern of flow, between plenary and small-group breakout sessions.

The meeting supported what was described later by participants as ‘brave’ and ‘radical’ thinking – and proved a pivotal moment for staff in understanding the nature of the task being undertaken. The comprehensive changes anticipated and questioning of the underpinning philosophy of the institution meant this was curriculum reform, rather than review.

Both of these curriculum reform projects went on to develop extensive consultation and discussion mechanisms to develop the architecture underpinning the reform to the curriculum in more detail during Phase I of the reform project. For both of these institutions this included decisions that created structures and principles for:

- module design in terms of credits and the shape of delivery of those credits within the timetable;
- semester and examination patterns;
- assessment practices;
- the relationship between students and staff captured through personal and academic tutoring;
- graduate attributes;
- principles for curriculum design in terms of learning and teaching approaches.

⁴ For a fuller description see Duffy, C. (2013) *Negotiating with tradition: Curriculum reform and institutional transition in a conservatoire.*

Associated administrative support and systems were also within the scope of these whole institutional curriculum reforms.

While the *products* (listed above) generated from these two curriculum reform programmes had commonalities, the way in which the senior leaders within the institutions developed the vision for the future and engaged staff in that process had an impact on the way in which other leaders within the organisation developed, communicated and implemented the curriculum reforms taking place. Both organisations explicitly set out to include all levels and types of staff in their discussions, and both organisations included students (within discussion groups and as part of the committee structures responsible for approving and implementing the curriculum reform processes). These factors were important in supporting the success of the curriculum reform projects, however, the nature of staff and student involvement appeared to be qualitatively different in each case. This had potential implications for future initiatives within each university and for the way in which the new curriculum was successfully embedded and delivered to future students.

The differences between the two approaches, in the extent of pre-agreed parameters for the curriculum reform discussion and the extent of staff and student involvement in the initial discussion and consultation period during Phase 1 became more evident after the point of agreement of the architecture for the new curriculum (end of Phase 1). These subtle differences surfaced at the point of redesign and revalidation for the various programmes on offer (Phase 2) and resurfaced again at implementation (Phase 3). Discussion, consultation and debate had secured agreement and Academic Board-level approval of the architecture of the reform, as described above. Implementing these changes in a whole institution, time-limited, programme re-design and revalidation process required wholesale change, and considerable work and action from the academic teams during Phase 2. This transition was described at Kingston, and the blurring boundaries between consultation, redesign, reflection and evaluation are apparent (my emphasis):

“The difference is that up until April [Academic Board approval] the work we were doing with colleagues involved consulting and thinking, and looking at what was working and listening to people, staff and students. We didn’t then have the design set down.

From April we had the design set down so we had our framework, we had our delivery patterns, we had our agreed variances, we had our assessment stipulations, we had the outline of our personal tutoring scheme, and so on. So then it was question of working with people very, very closely to think in their own local context what this might mean. Working through particular problems for people that they were having in redesigning their curriculum. But also then trying to make the most of what we kept learning as we went on, for example ‘Oh well you might do it like that’ and if that works for this set of people then actually we might find that using that particular form of synoptic assessment would also transfer very usefully to a completely different discipline and set of courses. (emphasis added) (RAF Project Lead, Kingston.)

The redesign teams became the sites of intense discussion and debate at a very detailed level, and it was here that differences in the sense of ownership of the curriculum reform initiatives became apparent. These debates moved from a focus on the architectures and general principles of the reforms to the way that these architectures would be integrated and related to the *content* and *context* of individual programmes and qualifications. Staff at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland discussed these differences:

“They were actually very difficult meetings some of those. They weren’t plain sailing at all. There was a huge kind of ... a difference between music and drama. I think the staff had different perceptions of the student need and the student experience. I think at times we were at loggerheads with things. But we worked through it.” (Staff team 2, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.)

Some members of the redesign teams had not participated in all of the Phase 1 discussions, particularly at the much larger Kingston University, and the proportion of staff who had participated in the earlier discussions was important in the way that teams took on board the work required for redesign and revalidation. Big issues were often revisited within team discussions and the way that learning design and content related to the curriculum architecture meant that sometimes teams sought exceptions to whole institutional policies. The way that these requests and issues were supported and dealt with by the dedicated curriculum reform teams was a key element supporting success for the overall institutional reform process.

Moving to a distributed leadership approach within the project

As the development of new programmes became the focus of activity for academics, these curriculum reform initiatives could be said to rely upon a distributed approach to leadership within the organisation (Van Ameijde et al 2009). For all the case study universities this was a pragmatic approach that dealt with the realities of existing university structures rather than a strategic decision relating to how to manage the work of the projects. Central teams had very little power, and often no authority, in relation to the work of the faculty and largely relied on individuals' agreement with the vision and design that had been negotiated during Phase I of the project, or the excellent communication, negotiation and persuasion skills of individuals within the central team.

During the interviews with academic leaders, some programme leaders felt that senior leaders within a faculty could have been more active in demonstrating greater support for the curriculum reform initiative and the work that this involved, particularly at the larger institutions (Kingston and Curtin) where deans were not necessarily involved in the curriculum reform projects. But, inevitably, not all the leaders distributed through the organisation necessarily shared the vision that had been developed during Phase I and this became clear when these concepts were made concrete and changes in working practices were required.

The relationship between these Phase 2 teams and the central curriculum reform team that had been established at Phase I was complex. It was here that tensions between management of academic workload, the parameters of decision making, disciplinary differences and the sense of engagement and ownership of the reform process emerged. Who led these teams, and who participated in the work of these teams became significant for the way in which teams went on to complete the revalidation and redesign process.

At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland the Programme Design Teams that were established for the different programmes included past and current students, academics and industry professionals. A senior member of staff commented:

“We went into these discussions - we knew that there were differences, but actually finding out how profound they were in certain respects, was absolutely fascinating.” (Dean, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.)

Even within these successful reform initiatives, discussions were described as ‘robust’, ‘challenging’ and even ‘difficult’, but also ‘rewarding’, ‘rigorous’ and ‘invigorating’. Including the external perspectives of industry professionals and graduates was seen as adding rigor and depth to these valuable discussions and enhanced the validity of the decisions that were made.

At both Kingston University and Curtin University the point at which reform and redesign was moved out to leadership within the faculties, schools and programmes was also the point at which disciplinary differences in philosophy and approach became apparent. Curtin University's aim to develop a high quality curriculum in the C2010 reform required culture change for academic staff and Oliver (2013) looking back, suggests this area of reform is the most difficult to deal with. Detailed notions of curriculum design became salient here, and Barnett et al's (2001) schema illustrating how differences in the weight of emphasis in curriculum design between knowledge, self and action in different subject areas can vary and be used to follow the changes proved useful.

In the three excerpts below from Kingston University the academic leads for Science, Business Studies and Midwifery all illustrate how their tasks differed in range and character, and the impact this had had on the way they had approached the redesign process. Individual course leaders each exercised their authority in different ways in implementing the institutional reforms in their disciplinary context and according to the space and staff willingness which they perceived was available to make changes.

Midwifery: RAF revalidation as an opportunity to look at the whole degree

“This was a good opportunity for us. The RAF was really good because it had said ‘Got to change double modules’ and that sort of thing. So we really wanted to very clearly change the programme. We did a SWOT analysis and looked at all we did well, looked at what we needed to improve on and looked particularly at how midwifery as a profession has changed in the, well probably in the last ten years rather than five years. How service is provided, you know, people working long shifts, all of our units now have got birth centres, so the promotion of normality. And going along with the promotion of normality, you’ve got women with complications that maybe 20 years ago wouldn’t be able to have a baby and now can. So it was very important that we engaged in the service providers with the development of the programme.” (Academic, Kingston.)

This decision led to the involvement of a wider constituency in the revalidation team, including alumni, placement providers and external professionals. This, in turn, led to rigorous debates about the shape and nature of the content of the programme in relation to the changed knowledge and workplace practices within this professional area, alongside and in tandem with discussions about the required changes to the architecture of the course. The emphasis of curriculum design was moving towards the domain of ‘action’ (Barnett, *ibid*) in relation to new knowledge required for the workplace, a tighter alignment between employer and professional requirements in the revised curriculum.

Science: added flexibility in teaching

For Science the process had been somewhat simpler, and units that currently existed were melded together to form the larger, 30 credit modules:

“For example in chemistry it was very easy and actually it was ‘That’s a natural structure, we’d like it like that’. In our previous structure we had organic chemistry 1, organic chemistry 2. Inorganic 1, inorganic 2, etc, so and actually the idea, for my team, the fact that you could teach that strand all the way through and then just assess at the end, it means that you could actually build up to it, a far better approach.” (Academic, Kingston.)

These well-established vertical disciplinary forms (Muller 2012) could be said to have a more generally agreed conceptual sequencing than knowledge forms more closely related to a changing workplace and economy. There were few demands to change the content of the curriculum here in terms of reorganising the course design, although there were separate issues in terms of implementation of learning and teaching practices such as formative and summative assessment and the risk of dropout associated with changing to an end of year assessment regime. The schema for curriculum design here remained dominated by the knowledge domain.

Business Studies: complexity in supporting a multi-disciplinary approach

Here the picture was complex and built around a structure where year 1 modules supported many degree pathways and needed to be broad enough to maintain choice, yet at the same time support the vertical disciplinary requirements for knowledge in areas as diverse as economics, marketing, finance etc.

“We have a very co-ordinated approach, a very matrixed structure in our faculty, so it needed a real kind of holistic view because we had to change 19 different undergraduate programmes where they shared a very high proportion of their early delivery in the first year and half of the second year. (Academic, Kingston.)

Within the curriculum design change schema the knowledge domain remained crucial here due to the complexities of developing this matrix structure to support the different subject areas.

The coherence of the whole university curriculum reform initiatives became contested in different ways as implementation and new curriculum design began to be distributed to leaders at different levels within each institution. Both the disciplinary characteristics and the personal views of these programme leaders had an important impact on whether the curriculum reform initiatives were embraced or contested within their teams.

Student engagement in redesign and revalidation

Key to maintaining student engagement in the learning and design process during Phase 2 was the sense that students' ideas were heard and acted upon, actively contributing to the reform process and the design of curriculum that followed. At the Conservatoire, consultation and discussion extended beyond the views of the course representative who attended regular meetings. A Year 3 student talking about new choice modules and the inclusion of modules supporting cross-disciplinary collaboration in the new curriculum commented:

“It was something that a lot of students that were here for the reform meetings brought to the table, and the Conservatoire took that on board, and this is where this whole idea has come about.” (Student, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.)

Another student commented:

“I wasn't one of the class reps at the time but we were all heavily involved with the curriculum reform in regards to our course, and our tutor, was quite instrumental in the course change. There were a lot of big meetings for the whole year group, and in our specialisms as well.” (Student, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.)

Alumni had been paid for contributing to detailed learning design meetings and current students had been offered some compensation in the form of canteen vouchers, however, more significant to the students was the sense that their contributions were valued, heard and responded to:

“Well, I think the main reason that so many students turn up here [to reform meetings] is because you're actually listened to and things do change. Any points that students bring forward I take them to the table, in departmental meets. And they're all addressed in some way or another. And it's not just us secretly sitting round a table and discussing it, pretending it's addressed. Our Head of Department makes the point of sending emails to the rest of the department saying this is what was discussed, this is what we're aiming to do. So because our Head of Department makes everybody so involved in it in that way, they therefore feel that they can come forward and express their views, and they're more willing to do so.” (Student, the Conservatoire.)

Students at Kingston were also broadly supportive of the curriculum changes to be implemented in the coming year, but had had less input into the detailed curriculum design teams in Phases 2 and 3 of the project. Although strenuous efforts had been made to communicate changes to the broad student body these students seemed more likely to identify problem areas, particularly around the potential changes to the choices available to them in the future, and the decision to roll out the reform to all current students, rather than to allow students to continue on their current degree programmes.

Leadership stability – staff and students

One of the key features supporting success at both Kingston and the Conservatoire was the stability of the senior staff group and implementation groups leading across all phases of reform. This was important in developing consistency through the longer term and in maintaining support for key decisions as they were implemented. The established nature of these groups meant they had been involved in the earliest discussions, had a personal commitment to the reform that was anticipated and a loyalty and commitment to each university and an interest in the future of their own institution. In short, these leaders, at all levels, took a degree of ownership for the initiative.

Student leadership could be more problematic over such a long-term project due to the nature of annual student president elections and annual moves of students through years, out to placements and completing their studies. Both Kingston and the Conservatoire had made efforts to minimise these effects. At Kingston this was through the involvement of both the elected president and the NUS official at the RAF management group and support and discussion with the course representatives. At the Conservatoire the establishment of positive and active responses to student comments and questions, along with rewards and payments for students and alumni contributing to learning redesign, had maintained student involvement, sometimes from the same individuals, over a number of years. Early student engagement and the sense that the student contribution was valued and could make real differences to the curriculum under development helped to maintain student involvement through the different phases of the projects. Academic leadership and practice in supporting students was a key issue here.

Conclusion

Leithwood and Rhiel (2003, p.5) argue that “Three broad categories of practices have been identified as important for leadership success in almost all settings and organisations. They are setting directions, developing people and developing the organisation.” Setting direction includes identifying and articulating a vision that embodies the best thinking about learning and teaching. Identifying what this might be inevitably has philosophical overtones for institutional leaders. Gibbs (2012) identifies that current data and institutional information in the UK may not provide indicators that clearly relate to quality of learning (eg class size as a predictor of learning gains) and that a drive for financial efficiency may impact on learning and teaching strategies. In establishing a shared vision for the future, leaders needed to clearly define the parameters of the initial vision, and in each of these case studies the issue of finance was explicitly out of scope. Class size was also out of scope unless related to minimum numbers and course viability. What was striking about the overall group of case studies was that the detailed thinking about learning and teaching in context often happened *after* the leadership vision had been agreed, and communicated to, staff and students. One exception to this was the highly democratic process at the Royal Conservatoire, Scotland, where these issues, including a pedagogical approach to learning, had been discussed in the extended time devoted to Phase I of the reform process.

While the senior leaders in these two case studies could be described as having a participative approach to leadership, the extent of participation in vision creation and decision making about the architecture to support curriculum reform differed. Successful reform was supported by effective academic leadership distributed throughout the organisation, and effective student leadership and participation in the different phases of the curriculum reform initiatives. Exploring whether differences in leadership styles and boundary setting in developing a vision for reforming an organisation are related to staff engagement and support for implementation of reform initiatives may be an important area for future research in universities as organisations.

Engagement in reform initiatives also had a direct relationship with organisational size. Size did seem to matter in these two cases, where the far smaller Conservatoire was able to engage a majority of staff and students in active discussion and dialogue from the early development of the vision through to the design and implementation of the new curriculum. Monitoring the extent and length of staff and student engagement in reform initiatives would be one way to research this issue in more detail and to develop strategies for organisations of different sizes to engage staff and students in reform initiatives.

Theme 2: Timescales, decision points and staff development

“Becoming institutionally distinctive is not a quick or easy process. There are a few examples of institutions embarking on a long and detailed programme of identifying current weaknesses and strengths, analysing the market, and redefining goals, negotiated carefully with staff, bringing everybody on board, and implementing widespread changes across the whole institution, driven by an understanding of organisational change.” (Gibbs 2012, p.41.)

Clear timescales for HE institutional reform activities can be difficult to establish and are extremely variable. Placing boundaries around whole institutional activities labelled as ‘curriculum reform’ is difficult within complex organisations such as universities where multiple social practices contribute to the tangible and intangible aspects of this work. It can be unclear where the general practices of thinking, developing, improving the curriculum and individual reflection on learning and teaching end, and specific reform activities begin. As the Midwifery team at Kingston University illustrate, one activity becomes embedded within another.

Boundaries marking these activities as curriculum reform initiatives were established by the articulation of the activity as such by senior leaders, and in the creation of funding and appointment of staff specifically tasked with reform activity work. When the research participants discussed the timescale for these reform initiatives the starting point and dates were clear; staff appointments had been made and resources allocated for a particular time period. The participants seemed to have more difficulty in identifying clear end points for the initiatives, and none of the participants included an evaluation phase within their discussion of the time that the curriculum reform work had taken. Evaluation was perceived as an additional activity and seemed to fall outside the parameters of the projects in terms of both personnel and funding for these initiatives.

While the activity generated through the work of reform was captured by the three phases identified earlier (architecture; redesign and revalidation; and implementation), there were also two outlying phases that were common to the entire wider group of universities in this study: the ‘precursors’ and the loosely defined ‘evaluation’ phases (see Table 2).

The precursors related to previous initiatives and change initiatives which had built up institutional experience. Key members of the current reform project teams had often been involved in these previous initiatives. The evaluation phase was loosely defined, if at all, and often placed outside the parameters of curriculum reform project funding or staff activities. This not only minimised the costs of a reform initiative, but tended to focus evaluation on the activities of the project in itself – a formative evaluation to assist in completing the process of reform - rather than considering the impact of the changes for the institution at the end point of the initiative.

‘Table 2: Phases of reform in relation to time’.

Phases of reform	Precursors	Phase 1: Architecture	Phase 2: Redesign and Revalidation	Phase 3: Implementation	Evaluation
Variations in time identified	Most often strategies, projects and activities taking place during the last two years.	Most frequently one year rising to three years in some cases.	Shortest six months, most frequently one year. Exceptionally two and three years.	Big bang <u>or</u> phased/incremental implementation by Faculty and Department. Immediate whole institution start to maximum five years, commonly three years.	Varies from no explicit evaluation to routine five-year programme review. Few explicit evaluation strategies. Differences between process (formative) and outcomes (summative) evaluation.

Phases and decision points

Within some initiatives the decision points and moves between phases was very clear, shifting from consultation and discussion, through a decision point often made at Academic Board or strategic level, for example outlining the required form of the new curriculum, its architecture and any content to be included such as Graduate Attributes. The implementation of this agreed curriculum architecture was then moved to Phase 2, a redesign and revalidation phase where academics within programme teams were set deadlines and clear completion points at a revalidation approval meeting (and often provided with support from central teams, learning design teams and staff development resources). The implementation phase (Phase 3) required a decision about the planned implementation mode and date (or series of dates) for delivery of the curriculum to a cohort of students. For some universities this decision had been made in Phase 1, but for others this decision was reviewed, or discussed, at Phase 2, as revalidation took place. Occasionally, the whole process was more emergent and organic, timelines changed and stages merged, or individual faculties led the initiative and then supported other faculties in undertaking similar activities (for example at the University of Leeds and University of West of Scotland).

Four of the wider group of universities discussed embarking on a second whole institutional reform, and each anticipated that this could be completed in a shorter timescale generated through building on past experience of managing such projects and having established key architectures and systems that would also support a second initiative. For The Conservatoire, trimesterisation, the variation to limits in module credit size, and the way to discuss initiatives with colleagues, students and external professionals was established and worked well. For Curtin University, Australia, this meant speeding up reviews, a more focussed approach to changes in learning and teaching, and a better understanding of the relationship between initiatives supported at the centre and the need to embed resource and support teams within faculties. For Liverpool John Moores a focussed, centrally-driven initiative embedding learning in Year 1 provision was delivered in one year. This was described as possible due to the strong sponsorship of the Vice Chancellor (previous and current), positioning of employability in the institutional strategic framework, sufficient resource being made available, adjustments to systems being made available, and, essentially, building on the excellent academic, student and employer relationships established through the implementation of the 'World of Work' Programme:

“Gaining trust and also being seen as credible, being seen as people that can problem solve and come up with solutions, are really important aspects of this. Credibility and trust [in staff undertaking the reform project] is important.”

(Director of Graduate Advancement and Employer Engagement, Liverpool John Moores University.)

Most of the people involved in the curriculum reform teams were academics seconded from their roles, or academics that had moved into a central role within the university. At both the Conservatoire and Kingston University senior academics were appointed from within the institution to lead the project and they took a high profile and gained a large amount of respect and goodwill from staff across their organisations. At Curtin the Curriculum 2010 project had been led by a team of researchers developing and testing tools to be used by the wider community, and their scholarship of learning and teaching and research profile in academic journals added credibility to the tools which were then being embedded across the organisation. Oliver (2013) discusses the difficulties of embedding reform initiatives at Curtin University, academic staff engagement, and the time needed for innovations to come to fruition. Oliver does not mention size of the organisation, but Curtin was by far the largest university within this research and it would not be unreasonable to assume that size was a contributing factor and had an influence on both of these aspects.

The relationships between the central teams and the distributed leadership of the teams responsible for the redesign and revalidation were crucial to delivering the reform initiative within the time frame allocated. The support for staff, problem solving and driving forward of the process relied on excellent relationships and the credibility of these central reform teams. The academic leaders within these teams had to work hard to maintain collegiality, and even so, were often framed as managerialist (Trowler 2011), imposing change from the centre upon faculty colleagues where workloads were high and difficult discussions were taking place about revalidation.

Timescales for revalidation and implementation models

“Big bang, as in change it for everybody, or to phase in, phase out?” (Vice Principal, the Conservatoire.)

Two key decision points were the time allocated to Phase 2, (redesign and revalidation) and the model for the roll out of the new curriculum. These two issues were related and, in some cases, delays, changing opinions and professional revalidation requirements emerged in Phase 2 which changed an initial decision about the agreed model for implementation. The shortest timescale for revalidation identified was at Moi University, Kenya, (six months) where all programmes required revalidation and redesign to meet new State National Qualification requirements. The longest planned redesigns were at Curtin University (three years) and University of Leeds (three years) however, a series of initiatives and multiple consultations meant that Leeds now anticipates a five-year period for completion of the reform initiative. This issue of new policy directives and a fast-changing educational landscape also meant that other institutions have initiated a second curriculum reform initiative (University of Bedfordshire, Curtin University and Liverpool John Moores University) which raises the question of whether these initiatives could be considered curriculum reform, or the ongoing business within universities of curriculum review and development.

Four of the wider group of universities had identified an incremental or phased implementation model for the new curriculum. New programmes would be offered to new students as they were approved, and continuing students would complete the programme that was currently in place. This approach had costs, and, as Itaki (2007) points out student views are crucial here. Communicating the university approach and view of a new curriculum is important to ensure continuing/current students do not feel that they are receiving a tired and less academically rigorous learning experience, compared with those on the revised curriculum programmes. At The Conservatoire students had been instrumental in the decision to move from an original position of incremental roll out of the new curriculum to that of ‘big bang’ – implementation for all students, including current students. This move was made during Phase 2, as the new curriculum design of the programmes emerged and became visible to students.

“New curriculum was created by staff and students for everyone, and it was such an enhanced curriculum on the last one that it just seemed to make sense that everyone was on it. It allowed for more opportunities within your course, and outside your course, as well as allowing for all of the collaboration opportunities.” (Student, the Conservatoire.)

“They were all quite excited about it, beforehand, and now that it’s taken place they’re still really happy. I think if anything the fourth years that have had to carry on the old course because of the stage they were at, the ones that I’ve spoken to, are actually quite gutted they never had these opportunities.” (Student, the Conservatoire.)

For students, the details and content of the new curriculum were important, and this meant that different approaches to communicating the new curriculum and a more limited involvement in learning design had implications for an institution. Adopting a ‘big bang’ approach involved risk taking for an institution, and Kingston students, who had been less involved in the details of individual programme design and revalidation, expressed more anxiety about the potential pitfalls and risks of this approach:

“I think the Student Union’s worked really hard to be able to get us involved in what’s going on here but I think it’s been less work from the teachers, or the tutors, sorry, getting us involved. Without the Student Union I don’t think we’d have any of this information now at all. And we have had quite a few meetings and groups and forums and talking about what’s going to happen next year. We just don’t know what the actual content is.” (Student, Kingston University.)

The issue of choice, which had been anticipated by the DVC at the start of the reform project, surfaced here:

“And a lot of people were concerned about module choice. Some [optional] modules are made compulsory but some people complain already that there’s not enough choice, so they’re looking at it as though, if it’s going down to four modules, then it looks like there’s even less choice. (Student, Kingston University.)

Even with the adoption of an immediate implementation there were exceptions, some programmes required professional external, as well as internal university, revalidation and this took longer than anticipated. For some students on very specific degrees with a four-year cohort, completion of their programme required that they finish on the currently validated curriculum. These exceptions were agreed by the central curriculum reform teams, and these decisions generally were made during Phase 2. The University of the West of Scotland (School of Business Studies) dealt with this issue by a phased introduction to new years 1 and 2, allowing years 3 and 4 to finish their current curriculum.

This resolved some issues of vertical support for curriculum knowledge in final-year modules and concerns connected to placement years and module choice.

The big bang approach entailed other types of risk for an institution. New modules, approaches to personal tutoring and examination requirements were untested and student responses could impact on future National Student Survey ratings and the reputation of a university. Staff at both Kingston and the Conservatoire were aware of this. Staff at Kingston acknowledged they might take a 'hit' in the first year of implementation (in poor student responses to the NSS) and The Conservatoire had built an Implementation Task Group to offer a 'rapid response' during the first term of implementation to resolve practical difficulties and to closely monitor progress and student feedback to the new modules.

Staff development and support in curriculum redesign

“I think ultimately the key to making this work is people delivering it with enthusiasm and commitment.”
(Project Lead, Kingston.)

In undertaking these reform initiatives each institution acknowledged it was essential that staff received both formal and informal support to make the changes required. There was a sense within all the organisations that both staff development and culture change were key activities underpinning the success of these initiatives.

Three main areas of staff development and support existed across the projects, with a different balance in each organisation:

- support from the central learning and teaching or curriculum reform teams;
- staff support through mentoring and/or specific support roles within the organisation;
- activities that took place through more formal staff development programmes or events for individuals and cohorts of staff.

One aspect of culture change was developing the idea of a teaching team, a change for many academics who may have worked as members of research teams, or as individual researchers, taking a minor role in teaching activities focussed on the qualification or student experience.

“The other thing that’s really, really been important is the whole notion of a course team. And that did exist very powerfully in some quarters but it didn’t exist everywhere, and the building of those teams has been really central. And in some ways the actual activity itself has been what coalesced the team in a way, which can be quite an important thing.” (Project Lead, Kingston.)

Both Kingston and Curtin universities understood and expected the learning and teaching teams to distribute 'good practice' across the university – and to consider evaluative and contextual issues of practice across faculties. There was some tension here between this activity and ensuring 'compliance' with new whole university decisions and expectations about implementing frameworks and/or review decisions. The borderline between staff development/support and ensuring new decisions were implemented by individual lecturers was a difficult one to negotiate, particularly from a separate Learning and Teaching centre. The staff of the Teaching and Learning team at Curtin had worked hard at developing relationships with faculties that were seen as supportive. Again, personal credibility was an important factor here:

“One of the things that I think helps with credibility and establishing us as credible in the teaching and learning space is that [...] and I are both currently teaching, I co-ordinate a really large online unit with a thousand students in it and [...] is tutoring and co-ordinating a unit in an enabling programme as well. So we’re working directly with students.” (Courses Review team member, Curtin University.)

As their role became established as business as usual faculty-driven requests for team support and triggering CCR had risen to 40% of the planned activity for 2013.

“They were extremely helpful and they basically walked us through the process, so things like writing up the review of each of the units, about how you integrate your assignments and blend them with the University required outcomes (graduate outcomes) [...] if you don’t have those people it becomes a nightmare” (Senior Lecturer, Curtin University.)

The role of learning and teaching professionals has been discussed at some length elsewhere ((cf. publications by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and Whitchurch 2013)), and it was evident within this research that there were mixed views of their roles from the academics interviewed, even where relationships were positive. The Senior Lecturer at Curtin interviewed above had moved on from the CCR process to new team discussions about the structuring of knowledge content and student workload within the course. These issues were not seen as part of the remit of the Teaching and Learning team.

The Conservatoire also identified this sense of being within a new teaching team as important, and here a variety of activities encompassing formal and informal staff development took place. These included:

- whole institutional teaching and learning week where staff came together to discuss pedagogy and learning design;
- mentoring by senior staff to more junior staff leading the various teams involved in the reform project;
- various cohorts of 12 staff all (voluntarily) undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Arts Education (50 in total).

This created a momentum in moving the curriculum forward, and a sense of collegiality and sharpening pedagogical practice generated by the focus on the learning taking place.

“I think having completed the PG Cert it made me far easier to do that transition into the new curriculum because I had a deeper understanding of all of it, you know, in general. About it being more educational than vocational in some senses [.....]

“There’s actually loads of us, and myself and [...] included, have been through this postgraduate certificate too. [...] the fact that that was all going on through curriculum reform was brilliant because it meant that loads of people were doing case studies and research for their PG Cert but they were doing it based on something in curriculum reform. So everybody had a little vested interest in one little bit if nothing else ‘cos they’d done some research into student support or they’d done some research into transitions.” (Lecturers from Staff Group 3, the Conservatoire.)

Engaging part-time and hourly paid lecturers in curriculum reform discussions was a particular issue for the Conservatoire where large numbers of these specialist staff delivered a core part of the curriculum – developing individual musicians and performers to professional standards. These staff were active professional musicians and performers in their own right, and had other schedules with orchestras and opera groups. This meant that finding time to attend discussions and to take on information about how the new curriculum might be shaped and delivered was problematic. However, this group of staff also had current expertise and an understanding of the changing knowledge required for the professional field. The Conservatoire had taken the step of appointing an hourly-paid lecturer to act as support and liaison. He took Conservatoire business outside the institution and extended opportunities for these lecturers to become part of the institution through being recognised as the ‘link’ person:

“They often come and speak to me during a rehearsal or a kind of break of whenever they see me and so that’s why this role of kind of pastoral care, if you like, has grown arms and legs actually.”

Building confidence in the role and the institution was key to maintaining engagement here, but this was not always easy.

“That people trust me that what I’m doing is right. And secondly that I’m honest about what ... that I will be an honest broker about anything that becomes controversial.”

“It certainly has produced positive results, but like any institution [...] there are a minority of staff reluctant to change, and those are the ones I find the real challenge and I try to get them round to thinking that, actually, they are really important people that come into this building and what they deliver is really important.” (Part-time hourly paid liaison lecturer, The Conservatoire.)

Continuing these staff involvement initiatives was seen to be important to ensure the quality of the experience for all students, and over time, to complete the culture change for everyone involved with the institution. Like the other case study institutions participation in the activities of the reform initiative was, in itself, a development opportunity. At the Conservatoire that had allowed staff to plan a second postgraduate initiative with confidence.

Conclusion

The participants in this research tend to support Gibbs' (2012) view that universities setting out on the road to reform have rarely thought through and planned all of the long-term activities that may be involved in that process. Few participants discussed particular theories, perspectives or models of organisational change, and few of the universities had set in place robust evaluation models at the start of the initiatives. However, it seemed that it was the academic credibility of the ideas underpinning the reforms that were at stake and that these mattered most when academic teams were asked to implement the reforms into their teaching programmes.

Establishing timescales and models for project planning which include long timeframes for debate, engagement and the evaluation of the impact of reform for different cohorts of students is problematic for higher education institutions. There is a real possibility that estimating the true costs of a reform initiative in terms of time and resource at the 'vision' stage would result in university inertia as the business risks would seem too great to support change. However, it is the business of universities to continually develop the curriculum and reforming and revisiting the mission of the university is a necessary process in the face of external change and uncertainty.

Staff and student involvement in agreeing the model of implementation for the new curriculum was crucial to establishing goodwill and, potentially, mitigating the risks of reputational harm during the implementation period. All agreed the initiatives could not have been implemented without a variety of short- and longer-term staff development and support activities taking place to enhance student learning through better knowledge of curriculum design. Group approaches to staff development seem to have been particularly effective in developing staff confidence in the new approaches, which in turn conveyed confidence in the curriculum to the students.

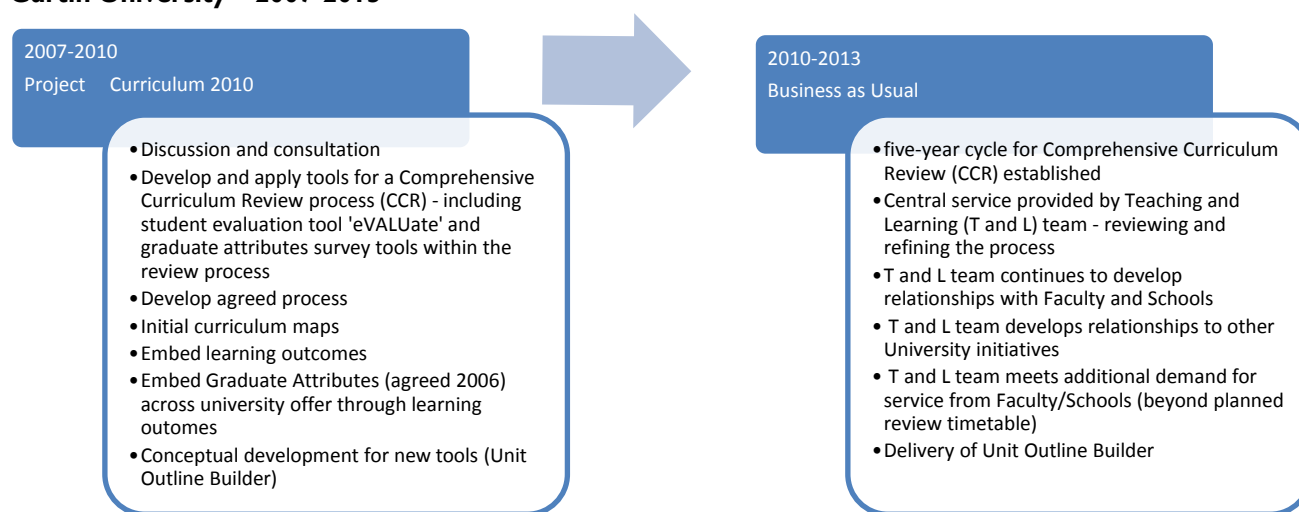
Wider dissemination of research and practice approaches such as the 'Enhancing Curriculum Design with Technology' (JISC 2013) and a coherent approach to staff development programmes could enhance curriculum development activities at the institutional level. Further research is needed on the impact of implementing these initiatives in different ways – the risks and implications for students and staff. This, in turn, raises questions about the ways in which curriculum reform initiatives can be evaluated.

Theme 3: Ending initiatives, evaluation and continuing curriculum development

The end of initiatives is rarely announced with the same fanfare as the start of a high profile change. McMillan suggests that momentum for change is lost once the support of senior leaders moves on and that ‘continued powerful support and the right environment are needed if the [change] process is not to slow down and fade away’ (2004, p.10). In these case studies of whole institutional curriculum reform big announcements about the commencement of a new curriculum were treated with caution. In relation to communicating reform initiatives to students this was associated with the issues connected with current and new students’ views of a changed curriculum offer, and the unknown elements of how the new curriculum would actually work for students. Communications with staff were often part of a communications plan and focussed on explaining new strategies, the reform initiatives and gaining staff engagement in the changes to come. As indicated above, ending the initiative, and then evaluating the impact of the reforms, were two activities that were less clearly articulated by those involved.

Curtin University’s Curriculum 2010 initiative offers some useful ways of thinking about how reform activities become embedded in a new ‘business as usual’ and what that might mean in terms of on-going curriculum development activities. An overview of the way that curriculum reform initiatives have moved into business as usual, is presented below.

Curtin University – 2007-2013



Ending the initiative

Ending the project through implementation of the new curriculum or achieving the stated goals, in Curtin’s case a review of all courses and the development of the new tools for Annual and Comprehensive Curriculum review (CCR), was clearly related to established timelines (and funding) for curriculum reform initiatives rather than evaluative activities associated with the outcomes of these projects. At Curtin there was a decrease in staff within the team as the CCR process became part of the quality processes of the university. The project responsibilities were redistributed around the Curtin Teaching and Learning team and inevitably some members of staff that had been involved in the initiative either left the university or returned to their faculty responsibilities. The new situation was not, however, a return to business as it had been prior to the C2010 project, the Deputy Vice Chancellor clearly articulated the value of the on-going, new, ‘business as usual’ costs.

“There’s an investment that wasn’t there before, and so you accept that. But then we would say we have a high quality product, we’re more efficient and more productive and therefore revenue strengths come in and are greater, so you can certainly qualify why you’re spending money on the course review process. Because it’s a good process and it’s a good quality product at the end.” (DVC, Curtin University.)

Even so, she acknowledged the difficulties in managing this process with a smaller team, and some of the difficulties that this caused in the very long timeframe for some courses to complete the review process; up to two years for large courses with multiple qualifications within them.

“Of course going from the very large team to the small team had a very big impact on the people doing that work. Look, the work’s been done and it’s been done well. I’m not sure the things that are holding up the process would have been really rectified by more resources back in the team.” (DVC, Curtin University.)

The difficulties referred to here related to the way in which faculty members continued to relate to the CCR process, a decreasing priority within the Faculty once the push for the original Curriculum 2010 reform had been achieved. This also related to the way in which changes to courses made as a result of faculty decisions part way through CCR required the Teaching and Learning staff to backtrack and revise work already completed; extending the time and work involved in any course review.

The relationship between project team staff, the closure of curriculum reform initiatives and the need to embed new work within the ‘business as usual’ structures within the university were also under discussion at Kingston and the Conservatoire. At Kingston the project team had recognised early in the process that the new curriculum would require support as it bedded down from September 2013, and it had been agreed that the team would remain in place during the initial year. Recognition that the continued development of the Academic Framework would require clear ownership, support and energy emerged from discussions about the closure of the project. A new post, Dean of Teaching and Learning, has now been established with the Academic Framework and ongoing curriculum work located within the portfolio, securing the future of this aspect of institutional work. This post will also develop evaluation methods and monitor the curriculum reform initiative to support future development.

At the Conservatoire the teams involved in Programme Redesign were concluded, and a new, smaller, Implementation Task Group (ITG) and Curriculum and ELIR⁵ Group (CEG) set up to act in response to feedback in the initial implementation period. As all groups at the Conservatoire had been drawn from current staff (with the exception of one additional role, which continues) the team involved in monitoring the implementation was constructed from staff that had been involved in key work earlier on in the initiative. The CEG was in the process of becoming a new committee, part of the structure of the university, but former programme teams and the former committee were clearly ‘closed’ and this work replaced, rather than was in addition to, work that had taken place prior to the curriculum reform initiative.

“CEG (Curriculum and ELIR Group) will be disbanded and CELTS (Committee for Enhancements in Learning, Teaching and Support) will be created. It’ll have wider membership and we hope that’ll help get buy in and disseminate information more effectively than CEG has done. CEG was a good, focused task group but we don’t feel the need for weekly meetings next year. So we’re moving to monthly meetings for CELTS and that’s going to be responsible for the enhancement led side of things whereas the Quality and Standards Committee will be responsible for quality assurance.” (Registrar, the Conservatoire.)

Evaluation

The boundaries between ending the initiative and the evaluation of that initiative were, as identified in Theme 2, opaque and permeable. Definitions of success were different for different stakeholders and evidence for success hard to capture for some of these different definitions. Skinner (2004) identifies primary and secondary barriers to the evaluation of change in public sector organisations and, crucially, one of the primary barriers that she identifies is a focus on ‘grand strategy’ (p.151 Figure 1). Implementing a vision for whole institutional curriculum reform could be said to be an initiative relying on a ‘grand strategy’. She highlights that, along with complex contextual factors, “the power and resources necessary to instigate formal evaluation processes, and to make use of the findings, rest with the dominant stakeholder group” (p.151), in this case the DVC or PVC or senior managers who had established a vision to underpin notions of whole institutional reform.

It is perhaps therefore not surprising that due to the complexities of establishing an approach to evaluation, the long timescales involved, the resource costs and the political implications, that evaluation strategies became subsumed into creating an effective ‘business as usual’. Perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of curriculum reforms that had taken place were more often the informal views of the staff that had been involved than part of a formal evaluation process. At Curtin University as a new DVC was appointed, time and distance from C2010 were established, and shifts in the environment for universities took place, further change initiatives associated with a new ‘vision’ came into scope.

⁵ Enhancement-led Institutional Review – the Quality Assurance method used by the QAA Scotland, see www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/Informationandguidance/pages/ELIR-information.aspx

In some respects Curtin's C2010 project developed its own task-based evaluation, in that it successfully achieved its objectives, to develop tools such as the ongoing Comprehensive Curriculum Review process itself, and in applying a review process to all Curtin University courses within the three-year timescale of the project. The curriculum review practice within the university had been changed. This type of 'outcome' analysis (Hanberger and Schild 2004) of a programme focusses on goal achievement, in this case providing the process for curriculum review, reviewing courses and embedding graduate attributes, in a set time scale. The current DVC identified that this approach had been successful in achieving the goal of raising the quality of the curriculum, but reflected that the evaluation had not really looked at the outcomes from the initiative for the university as a whole, particularly in the current funding environment. Two weaknesses of the reform process that she identified were both located around issues of finance: *"It certainly didn't focus on the revenue we were getting from curriculum."*

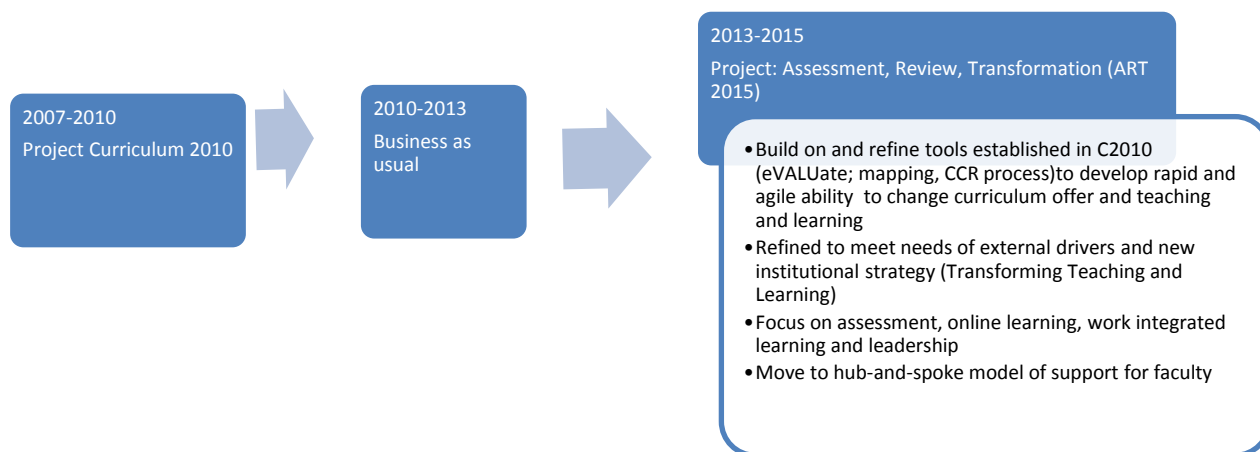
"At that time we didn't look at financials around the course.[...]They did the review of the course but never looked at the financials. It started to come in later in the process, and many tools were developed alongside it, but it was never really embedded in the process in a really systematic way across the university."

And secondly: *"Decisions were being made about that sort of coding of units at quite a low level in the organisation where people had no strategic understanding of what that actually meant in dollar terms. Because if you tweak a unit that way instead of that way it can have a really big funding implication. So I developed a process in the faculty whereby we looked at the cluster funding of all of our courses and that was really quite necessary because it was something that I think personally we were let down in the process with Curriculum 2010 and the subsequent course review process. So for me it's probably more around the dollars."* (DVC, Curtin University.)

The focus for Curtin was moving from one of embedding graduate attributes and quality processes within curriculum review to one of institutionally-led review, with a focus on innovation, financial viability and reforming the curriculum in terms of mode of delivery.

"What we now want is a new product for the 21st century, and the world changed last year in terms of online education." (DVC, Curtin University.)

This did not mean that pedagogy was no longer a consideration, but that this was not the only consideration. A new curriculum reform project had been set up by the current DVC, ART 2015, to implement some of the strategic objectives of the 'Transforming Learning' the current Strategic Plan (2013–2017) and Learning and Teaching strategy at Curtin University. This built upon and developed C2010, as illustrated below.



For the new reform project, ART 2015, the evaluation process was described as being more 'outcomes focussed' than process orientated, although the details about how that evaluation would take place were as yet unclear.

“Evaluation probably will be much more outcome focused than around the process. So I need new markets, new revenue streams, I need a transformed product. And the measure of success really is for Curtin to be recognised as the thought leader in teaching and learning in higher education in Australia in the next five years.” (DVC, Curtin University.)

The learning and teaching teams had been reorganised to align with the new ART (Assessment, Review, Transformation) areas of focus, and the need for a project (funded and reporting to the DVC) to transform the curriculum was once again identified as a three-year initiative, with staff and funding attached – before moving once more to a new business as usual. The vision for the future had changed, and therefore the curriculum required rapid review and change to respond to this external environment. The work would continue to be led by central teams and a dedicated project team to push forward the change.

“But you’re still going to need a technology team, a review team, and a team that’s focused on assessment. We really believe that higher education is no longer about universities being a repository of knowledge, it’s actually about assessment excellence. That’s our focus. We think that’s the future.” (DVC, Curtin.)

The ‘we’ here is the voice of the DVC speaking for the university and her future vision of the role of the university in the 21st century. The future university here sits within a new knowledge economy where on-line education could be freely available, but the assessment of students’ achievements and capabilities would remain one of academic judgement. The strength of this vision, and her position of authority within the university, meant that this had a powerful influence on the ART reform initiative.

As Skinner (2004) indicates above, it would not be easy to measure the direct impact the curriculum reform activities of ART 15 would have in relation to this type of leadership vision. The C2010 project was successful in developing the tools and review required at that time, and in developing these tools during the interim period (2010–2013), and this had been recognised externally through the Australian Universities Quality Agency⁶. There was, therefore, no driver or prompt to conduct a more formal evaluation of the project itself, and, in the subsequent project, the way that evaluation might operate differently in relation to achieving the ‘outputs’ was unclear. In her discussion the DVC is clearly referring to outcomes for the university as a whole rather than project completion goals in themselves.

There are other types of evaluation that could be appropriate here. Hanberger and Schild (2004) suggest that while an outcome analysis focusses on goal achievement, cost effectiveness and accountability (an essentially managerial approach) qualitative network analysis can focus on who, and how, people contribute to solving a problem, old and new networks and adaptive learning. Like Saunders et al (2011) they suggest a participative approach to evaluation is ‘better placed to serve the needs of participants’ and that therefore participants will be more likely to value the evaluation conclusions and to learn from the evaluation process.

A range of other evaluation models exist. Saunders et al (2011) discuss domains of evaluative practice at the national, programmatic (sector-wide), institutional and individual levels, and identify a range of evaluative approaches within each of these domains. Within this volume Bamber (2011) points out the need for reconceptualising institutional evaluation practices in relation to ongoing organisational development and learning. She identifies the specific difficulties in establishing transparent and explicit uses for evaluations when there are close links with both quality systems and funding regimes for higher education institutions around the world, and a need to develop shared understandings about how evaluative data will be used. Saunders et al conclude: “*At its heart evaluation is about looking at how social practices on the ground have changed as a result of an intervention, and what the value of those changes is, if any.*” (p.203). The many continuing problems involved in setting up an approach to evaluation and its practice (how change is captured through data, and of how value is attributed to change) are complex. The relationship between leadership vision, change initiatives, evaluation, continuing organisational learning and continuing curriculum development is subtle and fluid, and warrants further investigation.

Continuing curriculum development

In these three case studies, and more broadly, institutional evaluation tools, linked to both quality and funding, can work to contribute to continuing curriculum development and could be used to retrospectively evaluate the impact of the curriculum reform initiatives. The Annual and Comprehensive Curriculum Review processes at Curtin is an example of where a reform project had a long lasting impact on the continuing curriculum development process, and a number of the tools developed and applied during C2010 continue to play an important part in supporting continuous curriculum

⁶ Now The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Australia's independent national regulator of the higher education sector.

development. The eVALUate tool, in particular, illustrates how, over time, student feedback tools can validate and evidence changes which are generated through the comprehensive curriculum review process⁷.

eVALUate is an online student survey which allows both quantitative and qualitative responses across a number of items at the level of the unit: “*Its quantitative items report students’ perceptions of what helps their achievement of learning outcomes (Items 1 to 7), students’ level of motivation and engagement (Items 8 to 10) and their overall satisfaction with the unit (Item 11). Two qualitative items ask about the most helpful aspects of this unit and how the unit might be improved.*” (Tucker 2013, p.8.)

As a mechanism to track the impact of change, and thus, over time, the impact of the C2010 project, Tucker (2013) identifies improvements in feedback, student workload and overall satisfaction over a three-year period following review. She comments: “*Without the transparent timely publication of student feedback through eVALUate, the Curriculum 2010 strategy would not have been possible.*” (p.15.) However, she acknowledges that measuring student satisfaction and responses to the curriculum are complex, and that attributing the impact of changed results to any one factor, such as a curriculum review and change, is highly problematic.

While this type of tool supports one element of evaluating curriculum reform over the longer term, more immediate responses can be used to develop curriculum in response to the changes that have taken place. At the Conservatoire initial student surveys and quick response mechanisms were used to respond to comments from both students and staff arising from the changes that had taken place – new marking schemes, ‘independent learning week’ and the new tutorial system. These responses were discussed by the implementation team and CEG and an evaluation made about the impact and effectiveness of the new curriculum and how this was being embedded and received by students and staff. An action plan was developed that related to both short-term actions and longer-term developmental aims.

“*Now some of the things we’ve been able to change quite quickly. So for instance, we gathered feedback after the first independent learning week. And clearly there was more guidance needed on what can happen and what cannot happen in independent learning week, and we put that in place for the second one, just by a communications bulletin and then through the schools’ committees. Other things are bigger, need approval, proper consultation and a bit more thought. For example, the new assessment scale. After the first progress committee we thought that would be a good point to dip our toe in the water and say “How do you feel about it now?”*” (Registrar, the Conservatoire.)

The Action Plan, based on a wide range of data (qualitative and quantitative) would include items that had been dealt with in implementation, items that might be monitored and reviewed in the coming year and items that would work towards continuous curriculum development for the institution. The curriculum reform initiative would be replaced by continuing improvement and review and a four-yearly review process had now been established. The reform initiative could be said to have been subsumed into a continual review and enhancement process. This illustrates most clearly the distinction between what was considered to be an evaluation of a curriculum reform activity and what was considered to be part of on-going curriculum review and development activities.

⁷ See Tucker, B. (2013) *Student evaluation to improve the student learning experience: an Australian university case study* for a fuller description of the eVALUate tool and the research associated with this initiative.

Conclusion

The distinction between curriculum reform and continuing curriculum development was understood and made clear by the participants in these case studies. Although reform activities (at both Curtin and the Conservatoire) clearly contributed essential elements and structures that would inform the way in which curriculum development and review took place in the future, this did not mean that whole institutional curriculum reform would not take place again. Reform activities included establishing the structures supporting the curriculum (including those structures which would support a continual review and development process), the disciplinary content, the pedagogic approaches to be used and relationships between students and the university in relation to both organisational expectations (from both sides) and in relation to student/academic relationships. Building upon these new structures Curtin had identified a shift in the external environment that required further reforms for the institution, developing learning and teaching practices for new modes of delivery and a new global environment for universities.

The ending of reform initiatives and the move to continual development was important and needed to sustain and build upon the changes that had been made. Closure of project-led activity needed to be clearly thought through in terms of the way that reduced resource and continuing teams and committees could maintain the review and developmental work. It was at this point that the balance between central support teams and peripheral support within faculties became salient. For a small institution such as the Conservatoire the continuing central committee and quality team would be able to build upon the networks and contacts they had now established with a wide range of university colleagues. For Curtin, over time, the interests of the central Teaching and Learning team could diverge from new faculty priorities and continual effort and resource was required to engage and re-engage faculty members in the CCR process. The size of the institution, and the way that organisational structures support the different areas, were important features influencing the ways in which the changes established through the reform initiative would be maintained.

There were a number of challenges in evaluating the impact of the reform initiatives (identified as separate from the usual quality measures used by an institution). As noted earlier, the case study and the wider group of universities seldom developed an approach to evaluation and its practice (how change is captured through data, and of how value is attributed to change) at the start of the reform initiative. There were difficulties in relation to the timescale of these initiatives and in the complex ways in which these changes relate to the student experience and their achievements. The potential use of such an evaluation is also an issue here as the initiatives often related to leadership vision for the whole institution, but the activities and change initiatives themselves influenced specific activities and practices for those working within the institution. The relationship between these domains, that of the institutional level external facing position, and that of the internal structure and content of the curriculum, is something that is not yet fully explored.

Section 3: Discussion and recommendations

In what ways were these curriculum reforms related to notions of a changing global environment and the knowledge economy?

In considering this point the differences in the domains of the whole institution, the senior leaders responsible for the institutional future, that of academics and others involved in programme design and the experience of students become sharply delineated, and perhaps these elements only come together when taking the very long-term historical view. For each institution it was clear that a great deal of effort, resource, discussion and reflection over substantial periods of time were devoted to considering the issues related to the various elements within the different dimensions of curriculum reform. The extended peak of activity devoted to reform initiatives both emerged from, and subsided into, longer-term curriculum development and enhancement activities that were the usual business of each university. Nevertheless a number of lessons can be learnt from the experiences and change initiatives reported upon in this work.

At the institutional level the vision for the future generated by senior leaders and others related to broad ideas about institutional positioning and the student experience. The history of the institution and the imagined trajectory for the future of the institution shaped the nature and extent of this vision as much as views of learning and teaching held by senior leaders. In relation to reforming the curriculum the ways these visions became concrete varied considerably across the many elements that comprised the architecture, the disciplinary content and the learning and teaching practices which impacted upon student experience. What the student experience of the new curriculum might be, and how that related to the initial vision, was not a simple issue.

Recommendation 1: A vision for change needs to be broadly shared and anchored in the teaching and mission of an institution and an agreed approach for the delivery of a quality student experience.

In terms of ‘policy borrowing’, institutions certainly looked at other universities – their competitors and others to benchmark their performance. The clearest evidence of this was the adoption of ‘graduate attributes’ or graduate statements across most of the universities involved in the research, although there were differences in whether these attributes were embedded within learning outcomes or acted as general statements about graduates from a particular institution. This external scoping was not always global, geographically local competitors were also important in terms of differentiating the curriculum offer, however, most of the universities within this study then moved on to reinterpret or ‘internalise’ new ideas to fit with their own mission and identity – developing their own graduate attributes and curriculum offer.

The notion of academic drift – the tendency of institutions to become alike and adopt new practices – did seem to apply to universities broadly adopting the notion of graduate attributes and that of a closer articulation between disciplinary curriculum content and the world of work. Even so, specifying these attributes and curriculum redesign activities focussed on the notion of institutional uniqueness and brand, clearly delineating each institution’s distinctiveness within the competitive university economy. There were different ways of approaching this articulation with the external world.

Recommendation 2: The shared vision should be drawn from a considered review of the external and internal context and elucidate a clear purpose to curriculum reform.

Recommendation 3: The intended outcomes of change need to be clearly articulated in relation to the institutional philosophy and approach to learning and teaching.

As a whole institutional reform process the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, internal and external, was important for both the development of new curriculum and the way the implementation of the new curriculum took place. A key issue here is one of maintaining student engagement in the learning and design process and contribution to the reform process and decisions around implementation.

Recommendation 4: Student engagement and involvement at all levels, and through all phases, enhances the process of curriculum reform and can have positive benefits at the implementation phase.

Recommendation 5: Staff and student involvement in agreeing the approach to implementation for the new curriculum is important and has the potential to mitigate the risks of reputational harm during the implementation period.

For the academic programme leaders, and other professionals within the institutions, disciplines with a close coupling to the professional world and the world of work did express a view that the environment had changed and that students needed new and different knowledge from those that had previously formed the basis of their programme. Flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing settings, technologies and environments were all important in a new curriculum, but retaining core knowledge was also important. For some disciplines changes to the canon were unlikely; however changes to learning and teaching practices would mean a focus on the additional and a broader notion of graduate attributes, as defined by the university, in addition to the established curriculum. Programme leaders in all disciplines looked externally, both globally to other universities and to practicing professionals, to stimulate thinking about curriculum redesign. As these different university programme leaders consult with global and multi-national employers it may be the case that curriculum content will become increasingly similar, but the evidence for this is not yet apparent as the tensions between the external world and the drive for a unique identity for the curriculum offer remain.

Recommendation 6: Cross-institutional communities of practice focused on specific disciplines, teaching and increasingly employability offer crucial insights into their areas of practice and should be actively engaged in the change process at the start of the discussions.

Recommendation 7: Short- and longer-term staff development activities that enhance student learning through better knowledge of curriculum design are required to develop staff confidence and capability. Programmes such as the PG Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and HEA accreditation could explicitly connect to, and support reform initiatives.

Evaluating whole institutional curriculum reform initiatives

There seemed to be a number of reasons for the institutions across the research to shy away from evaluations of the curriculum reform initiatives taking place. To be clear, this research did not set out to evaluate these initiatives, but to explore what measures or methods for evaluation the participating institutions used or found useful.

One important point that emerged from discussions with the participants highlighted a question about evaluation - in what sense *could* these initiatives be evaluated? Given the starting point was an educational leader's imagined future for their university in an uncertain world, and the long timeframe required for any evidence of change to become visible, the difficulties in establishing an approach to evaluation were considerable. In many ways the idea that institutional curriculum changes which specify graduate attributes and learning outcomes become embodied in the person of the student echoes a view of the past that is over simplistic and unrealistic. Starting from an assumption that an institutional curriculum can produce a student 'product' is problematic and uses a particular managerial discourse of cause and effect that is inappropriate as a measure of human activity, especially when related to learning and changing knowledge over time. Tools such as the 'policy implementation ladder' and the social practices approach suggested by Saunders et al (2011) may offer a way to begin to evaluate some aspects of these institutional curriculum reform initiatives, but explicit discussions need to take place at the start of these initiatives about the purpose of any evaluative activity and the potential use of the evaluative outputs.

Recommendation 8: Early on, change leaders need to consider the issues of evaluation (process and outcomes) and to put in place an evaluation plan (not just plan an evaluation).

Evaluation through tools that gather student perceptions of the curriculum did offer one aspect of continual evaluation that, over time, that might be used to establish change, albeit with many other factors and possibilities for that change. This is useful, and the case studies here used both qualitative and quantitative measures to contribute to on-going curriculum development. These measures could only capture *some* aspects of the institutional changes that had taken place for *some* (usually new) students. Different evaluations for the changes in practices for staff, and for the ways in which the reformed curriculum would be able to respond to any new knowledge economy were also needed. Within these case studies each of the institutions had embedded ways of including external professionals, often employers, in their design teams and revalidation processes. In terms of connecting with any current, or future, changes to a globalised knowledge economy revisiting these validation processes within a quality assurance cycle should ensure that connection was maintained.

Recommendation 9: The inclusive consultation processes should be reflected in inclusive evaluation plans which capture the views of all stakeholders (academic staff, students, employers, professional bodies).

With good review processes, closely connected to the external environment, why would an institution need to embark on a second whole institutional curriculum reform? This issue related to institutional positioning and De Jager's (2011) analysis is useful here. While it is unlikely that a small, specialist, institution would undertake this exercise more than 'once in a generation', the mid-level and the larger, mass educational institution are both placed in a very different competitive environment. To sustain or increase their market share establishing a clear identity at the mid-level, and demonstrating innovative practice and cutting-edge technology to enable expansion at the largest institution, were institutional strategies that were responsive to perceived changes in the external environment. If these responses were unsuccessful, or there were further shifts in the external environment, it seemed likely that institutional level curriculum reform initiatives could become necessary once again.

Recommendation 10: Reform initiatives need to provide a curriculum architecture, learning and teaching philosophy and disciplinary review process that can sustain flexibility in response to future requirements for institutional change and continual development in response to the external environment.

Recommendations for further research

A case-study approach reveals important aspects of the way these reform initiatives impact on the lives of staff and students within higher education institutions, and in this research offering up elements and dimensions of reform begins to suggest a way of conceptualising change at the level of the institution. There are other possibilities, and in suggesting further research it would be helpful to separate out issues of institutional form (organisational issues) from curriculum design in relation to content and learning and teaching practices in order to capture change in the curriculum over the longer term.

A textual analysis of institutional graduate statements, now being embedded into the curriculum at many UK and worldwide universities, would offer some insight into the question about institutional distinctiveness. Do these statements demonstrate a closer articulation with economic connections relevant to an institution which reflect its distinctiveness or are do they function as generic descriptors of 'graduateness' which outline expectations at the level of the degree in line with broad quality assurance guidelines? How are these statements generated? Do they involve consultations with local, national or global employers in an effort to respond to demands for changes in curriculum content? And how do these statements relate to the local, national or global economies universities seek to serve?

Recommendation 11: To explore whether the university offer is becoming more homogenous as the curriculum becomes more closely aligned with a global economy.

The titles of degrees are rarely an accurate indicator of disciplinary content, and as titles change the content may, or may not change – likewise content can be updated and changed when the degree title remains the same. The extent of choice within these degree offers could also be explored. Use of the HEFCE and UCAS data to explore curriculum change in terms of university offers in the UK is therefore limited. One way of approaching this may be to explore more detailed descriptors through institutional prospectuses - comparing the offer from a selected number of institutions using a sample from ten years ago and the present. Ten years appears to be the minimum length of time in which one could confidently expect curriculum review or revision to have taken place.

Recommendation 12: In order to assess changes in the curriculum offer over time a longitudinal study is required.

In conclusion, undertaking whole institutional curriculum reform is a complex process, and these recommendations could act as a series of discussion points for institutions prior to embarking on such an initiative. Across the many, and varied, ways institutions approach such initiatives making connections across the constituencies within, and outside, the university are essential. Engaging staff, students, employers and externals to bring together their expertise to develop, and continue to develop, new curriculum for the future provides opportunities for imaginative and engaging learning.

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Appendix A – Approach to developing the case studies

Making contact

There were two key elements to the approach used to generate the case studies presented in this study to address the identified research questions:

Breadth: to establish the extent of change within a variety of higher education institutional types across a global landscape.

Depth: to develop high quality and detailed case studies that illustrate a range of institutional successes in whole institution curriculum reform, evidenced through impact on student experience, and achieved through conversations with senior managers, academic staff and students, as well as analysis of a range of documentary evidence.

Initial exploration of curriculum reform across a range of global institutions was undertaken via a Call for Initial Case Studies, which was broadcast through a wide range of global channels including:

- readers and subscribers of the journal *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*;
- The European Access Network, a membership strategic-level institutional network of over 200 universities worldwide;
- The Employability Developers Network, a network of more than 800 UK and international members from a diverse range of background including careers advisors, subject specialists and academics with a responsibility for employability;
- EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities), a membership strategic-level institutional network of over 200 universities worldwide;
- Australia Africa Universities Network;
- International Association of Universities;
- Association of African Universities;
- Association of Carpathian Region Universities;
- Association of Commonwealth Universities;
- Association of American Colleges & Universities;
- European Association of Institutions in Higher Education;
- European University Association;
- Association of Indian Universities;
- Association of Swedish Higher Education;
- Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada;
- Higher Education Wales;
- Irish Universities Association;
- Universities Scotland;
- social network channels including LinkedIn and Twitter;
- The Open University's International Development Office.

Contact through these channels included a short information letter providing details of the project, the Open University and the Higher Education Academy. A template for respondents was included, which explained that the study took a broad approach to definitions of curriculum reform and asked for information in the following areas:

- primary contact;
- name of university;
- whole institutional change identified (for example new degrees, a new approach to curriculum design, reviewed HE mission, new target students/markets, new themes across the HE offer, new co-curricular offer/awards, revised graduate attributes);
- extent of change to institution (for example timescale, people involved, additional resources);
- drivers for change (for example financial, policy, competition for students, vision, new leadership);
- further contact/s for follow-up communication (please identify names and roles, for example academic, administrative or student representative and contact details);
- links to university website documents and upload relevant documents (for example prospectus past and present, institutional strategy, institutional statement);

- has this curriculum reform been publically documented elsewhere? (for example research journals, national reports, government reports).

Enriching responses

Eighteen responses were received, and these formed a data pool from which a smaller number of detailed case studies could be developed.

Ten of these institutions (the Wider Group) also agreed to take part in a telephone interview, which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, to explore in more detail the specific curriculum reform and its impact.

An interview guide was used to structure each interview, with a number of general questions asked of all institutions augmented by specific questions for each institution, based on responses to the Call for Initial Case Studies.

Interviews were with consent recorded and transcribed.

General questions included:

- 1 How would you describe the curriculum reform changes that are taking/have taken place?
- 2 What now forms the core/key to the curriculum and holds it together? Eg graduate statement, mission statement, global reach, research, learning and teaching links, widening participation?
- 3 What timescale is anticipated? Would you say the change to the curriculum is now finished, or on-going?
- 4 The time anticipated to impact on all institution, academics, non-academics, etc, any change to peripheral services or units? (careers service, library, VLE, personal tutoring.)
- 5 What new degrees have been/are being offered now compared with five years ago? (or are planned?)
- 6 Is whole university curriculum offer expanding or shrinking or remaining the same with different characteristics?
- 7 How will you judge the impact of the curriculum reform initiative?

Selecting the final three case studies

A steering group consisting of key stakeholders from the Higher Education Academic, The Open University and one further independent member, were asked to select three institutions which would form the main case studies, and be subject to an institutional visit. The case study approach would meet the key aims of the project: to provide case studies for the sector and to 'report on the real opinions, attitudes and practices of senior managers, academic staff and students in relation to curriculum reform and its impact in the institution' (HEA December 2012). In particular, taking a qualitative approach which included interviews, group discussions, documentary evidence and observations of meetings generated a detailed and in-depth picture of the reform initiatives within each institution to inform the analysis.

The steering group was provided with the responses to the Call for Initial Case Studies and summaries of the telephone interviews.

Three institutions were selected which were considered by the steering group to represent the most interesting examples of curriculum reform.

Institutional visits were planned in collaboration with senior staff from each of the institutions. A standard plan was proposed to each, consisting of a range of meetings as follows:

- 1 With the curriculum reform project team, if still existing, or key members from that team who have gone on to other things since.
- 2 With students, either through the students' association, student panels or another route. Aim to set up two focus groups of maximum eight students in each, from two different faculties if possible, or else a good spread from across the institution.
- 3 With staff, including:
 - Senior project sponsor (at Pro Vice Chancellor/Vice Chancellor level);
 - Deans
 - Directors of Teaching and Learning or equivalent
 - Heads of Schools
 - Academic teaching staff who have engaged in the process.

Meetings with more senior staff were generally held as one-on-one meetings, and other meetings held as focus groups. Online forums were also suggested to all institutions, but were in the event not required.

All discussions were recorded and transcribed for use in the analysis. NVivo software to support qualitative research was used to store and code the data in the development of the thematic analysis.

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