

## Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Update from Project Interim Reports December 2010

### 1 Introduction

This is a summary that attempts to synthesise key findings from the October 2010 interim reports for the Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme (the Design Programme for short). This should be viewed as a first trawl of the reports that draws out key 'headlines' and significant updates since the last set of reports. The aim of this paper is twofold:

- To help 'fast-track' the work of the support team by highlighting key points that various members of the team may wish to explore further in the follow-up calls.
- To form the basis of public facing updates that may be communicated in a variety of ways – most obviously via blog posts.

This summary thus differs from the more in-depth synthesis and mapping activities carried out by the synthesis consultant although it is to be hoped that the two will inform one another in an iterative way.

The summary refers back to one or two outputs that are less recent where these are newly available for public viewing in the Design studio and/or where this is necessary to permit this summary to be read as a stand-alone piece. The reports are also supplemented by notes from programme meetings etc.

The summary is the work of the individual author(s); any conclusions drawn are those of the author(s) and any attempt to summarise current views represented by the projects and/or the sector at large do not necessarily represent the views of JISC.

### 2 Methods

This summary will be made available to the programme support team at the same time as the individual team members' feedback on the project reports. It will be updated in the light of the outcomes of the follow-up calls and the work undertaken by the synthesis consultant. Once agreed as suitable for publication it will either be published in its entirety (minus this pre-amble) and/or in sections as posts on the Support Team blog.

The summary broadly follows the main headings used in the previous reports by Helen Beetham (Dec 2009) and Gill Ferrell (May 2010) although these have been slightly adapted to reflect the current state of the programme.

### 3 The External Environment

The first of these summaries included a final heading entitled 'other influences'. The May 2010 update noted, *'This heading may seem somewhat superficial at this point since the reality is that 'other influences' have tended to dominate thinking in recent months.'*

It is impossible to conduct any review of the programme at this point without placing it into its external context so this amended heading has moved into pole position in terms of key topics for discussion. Since the last set of interim reports we have had our first change in government for 13 years, the publication of the Browne Report (Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in England) and, in the last few weeks, the Comprehensive Spending Review. Tangible outcomes of these changes so far include a reduction of £600 million in public funding for English universities over the next two years, the closure of Becta, the end of funding for the Aim Higher programme and a severe reduction in funding for the Higher Education Academy resulting in the planned closure of its Subject Centre network. At the time of writing students are in occupation in universities across the nation protesting in the run up to a government vote on the level of student fees next week.

Although ‘other influences’ weighed heavily at the time of the last reports, the speed and extent of immediate change within the sector is unprecedented and unexpected. One has the impression that the current set of reports were drafted whilst still institutions are still reeling from the need to digest and deal with so much change so quickly and we wait to see how this will affect some of the projects in practice. What is however very evident is that the institutions still see the relevance and value of the projects (in many cases this is amplified in the current climate) even though they need to implement their objectives against a backdrop of significant upheaval.

#### 4 Moving Off First Base

This heading was the title of an activity undertaken by the projects at a programme meeting following the publication of a set of baseline reports in which they reviewed their curriculum design processes. The requirement to undertake baseline reviews is not standard practice for JISC projects and met with a mixed response at project start-up. In practice the process was found to be a valuable one and projects that were sceptical initially found that the activity of creating process maps was a useful means of engaging stakeholders in productive conversations.

The projects used a range of different approaches and tools in their baselining work from the [Rich Pictures](#) produced by the University of Greenwich through the use of [UML](#) at Birmingham City University (BCU) and the detailed [process maps](#) produced by the Cardiff PALET project to Bolton’s use of the [Archi](#) Archimate modelling tool. Greenwich adopted probably the most low-tech approach yet delivered no less useful results. It was noted that the most important element was not the maps themselves but rather the issues for discussion they generated. The approach revealed a lot of ‘urban myths’ especially around the extent to which IT systems caused bottlenecks in processes.

Equally a number of projects (particularly those at Strathclyde, Ulster and the OU working together as Cluster C) found significant ‘gaps’ in the processes in terms of critical elements of the educational experience. In many cases formal institutional processes simply do not encompass the practice of ‘educational design’. This ‘educational design’ is very often part of informal processes that are rarely documented. One of the key achievements of the Cluster C projects is inserting the appropriate ‘design prompts’ into existing processes and their work has considerable synergy with BCU’s efforts to capture the ‘lived experience’ of educational design.

What is interesting a year on is that, rather than heave a sigh of relief at having finished the exercise and put the outputs in a drawer somewhere, the project are still referring to their use, and updating, of the process maps. The BCU Technology-Supported Processes for Agile and Responsive Curricula (T-SPARC) project was probably one of the most sceptical about the value of process mapping at the start yet it is making excellent use of the maps it has created in a series of stakeholder workshops on programme design, review and approval: the latest report notes: *‘these process maps were used at the events as artefacts to catalyse discussion, comment and stakeholder review.’* The project is innovative in its use of a variety of tools and media to engage and feed back to stakeholders and in this case used photographs, Wordles of key words and Flip Video capture of responses to questions on analogue scales to enrich participants understanding of current processes and vision for a ‘To Be’ situation. They also state, *‘From the analysis of the data collected at the consultation events, it was evident that no changes to the draft processes in development were required since the evidence collected from stakeholders was an excellent match. We do not believe this to be fortuitous, but an inevitable consequence in having invested significant amounts of time in the review period at the beginning of the project.’*

It appears as if the baselining work would have been valuable in any circumstances however, given, the level of organisational change that has gone on in some of the participating institutions, it is particularly valuable in demonstrating to new senior managers what real and pressing issues the projects are trying to solve.

It seems to be the case however that the current funding situation shifts the goal posts more for some institutions than others. At the end of its baselining work Bolton concluded, *‘One of the most surprising findings from our work is that apart from a few ‘rough edges’ the validation regulations and process are reasonably agile and responsive. WE believe that technology does have a role to play in supporting the creative process of designing new courses and of saving labour, but the validation processes themselves are in reasonable shape – they don’t inhibit change’.* The current report now highlights the need to reconsider this in the light of external events: *‘Although earlier work identified that the curriculum development process is fit for purpose when judged against sector practices, the changes coming about through the reaction to the Browne report means that we must re-visit this question.’*

It may be suggested that having developed the tools and capabilities to engage in this sort of dialogue about process will help these institutions enormously in the times to come. The projects do however go beyond this in terms of also developing frameworks for curriculum design (including ensuring appropriate decisions about educational design are taken at appropriate times), identifying, developing and using catalysts for change (e.g. approval & review processes), promoting a language for discourse about curriculum design and encouraging and supporting collaboration, reflection and dialogue.

## 5 Different perspectives on the programme

### 5a Challenges

We noted last time that the projects are now operating in an economic climate that is vastly different to that in which the project outlines were conceived. What is interesting is that none of the challenges they identified at the outset seem any less relevant now. Institutions have for many years been aware of a range of social and economic drivers requiring new responses from the curriculum. What was becoming evident six months ago was the difficulty projects would face in achieving long term strategic goals in the face of immediate operational difficulties. What is unprecedented is the scale and rapidity of cuts in public funding which may indeed change the underlying business models for some institutions.

It was always to be expected that projects with such a broad scope and a four year lifespan would be subject to changes in staffing and organisational change during the life of the project. None of the project has so far escaped this and many are in the process of having to re-engage with a new Project Sponsor and set of senior managers. One project now has its third Vice-Chancellor in the life of a project which has only reached its half-way point.

The following quote seems to sum up the pragmatic approach to this situation within the programme:

*'The man who adapts his course of action to the nature of the times will succeed and, likewise, that the man who sets his course of action out of tune with the times will come to grief.'* Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1513

It has been something of a 'tradition', if such a thing can be said of innovation projects, for JISC projects to try to create a strong identity by means of a quirky name and marketing of the project 'brand'. Partly this is of course due to the collaborative nature of many JISC projects and the need for sector-wide project dissemination. Many of the Design projects are however seeing a strong project brand as an inappropriate route to achieving their objectives. The projects are instead focused on showing themselves to be responsive to their institutional context and priorities and are aligning themselves to other initiatives where they are content to be seen in a supporting role. This is indeed a sensible approach in any large-scale change initiative especially those which relate in some way to the use of new technologies. The clear message that the projects are addressing real business needs and priorities is one of the reasons why, to date, the projects have shown themselves to be remarkably successful in adapting to changed institutional circumstances.

City University's PREDICT project is linked to a Review of Undergraduate Education and the Strategic Learning Environment (SLE) Review project but is deliberately working in the background to avoid stakeholders feeling stressed by too many different initiatives and Birmingham City University's (BCU) T-SPARC project describes itself as '*nested within*' the wider ROLEX (Redesign of the Learning Experience) initiative. Greenwich noted the importance of the project having new staff who were seen as 'neutral' and who worked through official channels without setting up any new power base. Staffordshire's ENABLE project was positioned more centrally (the hub linking a series of spokes), due in no small part to direct backing from the previous Vice-Chancellor, but the project's very name and its pragmatic approach to using Enterprise Architecture to solve business problems (more on this in section 5d) show its awareness of the need to fit the context. An excellent example of showing where a project sits in terms of strategic objectives and other initiatives is the Cardiff University PALET project [Motherboard](#).

Far from these approaches meaning the projects are low-profile and likely to have little impact the reverse is actually true and section 5b discusses some notable successes in effecting large-scale change. Indeed, far from seeming less relevant than at the outset, many projects are seen to be delivering real benefits and the institution wants them to tackle other problems/processes. Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Supporting Responsive Curricula

(SRC) project, Cardiff University PALET project, Birmingham City University’s (BCU) T-SPARC project, Cambridge Course Tools project, Greenwich UG-Flex project and Strathclyde Principles in Patterns (PiP) project have all undergone changes in scope. At the time of the last reports many projects were identifying ‘Scope Creep’ as a live issue. Some of these issues have now been resolved in such a way that the projects are now confident of their ability to manage change requests effectively and identify those that represent ‘quick wins’ and opportunities as opposed to dangerous scope creep.

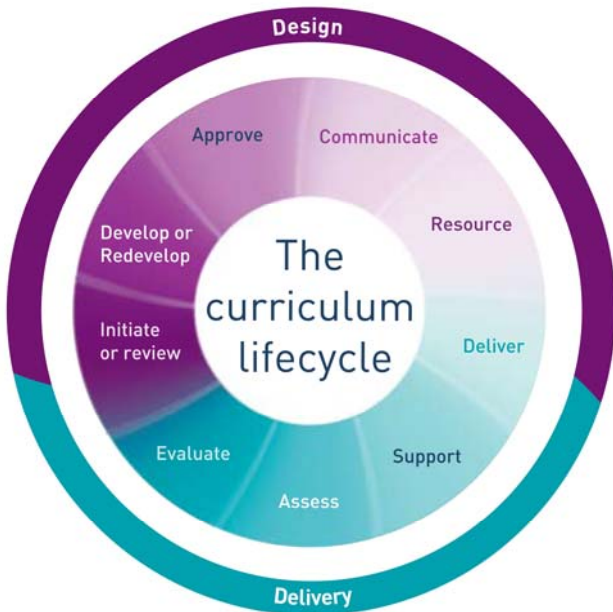
Greenwich has provided a helpful set of questions for projects in a similar situation wondering whether to accommodate stakeholder requests to achieve a ‘quick win’:

- Has the project identified clear overall goals, deliverables and activities?
- do you have a strong sponsor/champion with sufficient influence to deliver the quick win?
- is the balance between investment of time and impact of change weighted towards low investment and high impact?
- are the main beneficiaries of the change central to the wider change your project seeks to deliver?
- to what extent is the change proposed a recognised/shared business imperative?
- are you confident that the primary agents of change will deliver what they promise in the required timescale?
- Is the project in a position to delegate work to others and/or lever additional resources?

BCU (which identified scope creep as a live issue in its last report) comments on how its cluster of projects now views project scope: *‘As part of the activity we undertook with our colleagues in Cluster B, we generated a ‘Map of Curriculum Design’ – this map (generated with XMind) seeks to reveal the scopes of the projects in Cluster B. The collated scope, as represented by this resource, demonstrates that the projects have had to articulate themselves with a very large set of overlapping institutional functions. Rather than seeing the map as a representation of ‘scope-creep’ we see the map as a visual testament to the pervasiveness of the projects. For our project we feel this pervasiveness is proportional to influence, impact and sustainability.’*

**5b Processes**

These projects, whilst having the learning experience at their heart, are heavily involved in modifying institutional business processes. The albeit simplistic, image used as a window onto some of the programme resources serves as a reminder of how curriculum design touches almost every aspect of an institution’s business processes.



Almost all of the projects are concerned with curriculum approval and any modification to this impacts most of the other areas in some way. MMU Project Director, Mark Stubbs, noted that *‘We reach uncomfortable agreement over*

*sub optimal processes*’ and suggested one of the main reasons for this is that the sheer number of interdependencies between processes makes it very hard to actually change anything. He suggests that whilst it is often relatively easy to identify problems with an existing process it is less easy to think through a totally joined up alternative. In his analysis *‘Institutional processes survive by rolling over what we did last year & fiddling it a bit.’*

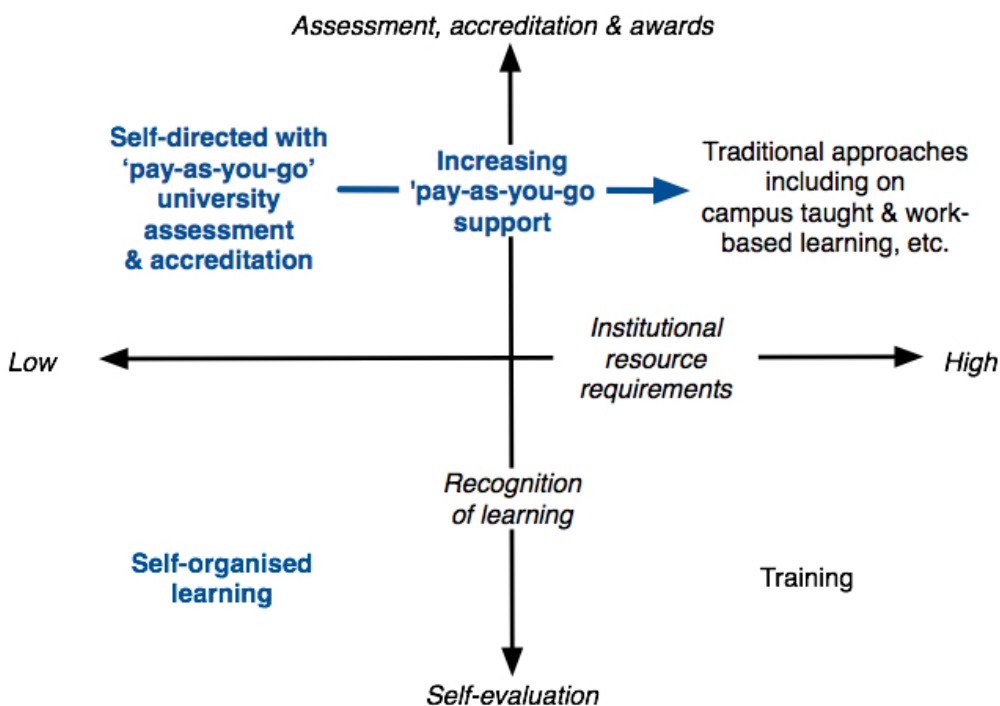
BCU noted a further issue in that institutions often place too much emphasis on the documentary artefacts produced by a process rather than the reflective processes themselves: *‘(the) focus on the products of curriculum design rather than the process of curriculum design distracts activity away from rich team discourse and innovative solutions to curriculum design challenges.’* They concluded that *‘approval practices tend to stifle innovation and require a documentary overhead that is perceived by staff as being disproportionate to its value.’*

Having said this the projects are actually making remarkable progress in terms of effecting process change in key areas.

**The Business Case for Curriculum Development:** the last set of reports highlighted many issues concern the stage before the detailed design and approval process i.e. the need to look at the rationale and market for new courses. At Cardiff the PALET Project is seeking to make Business Planning a more explicit part of the Programme Approval Process and is exploring how any risk associated with programme developments will be identified and managed. The OU has developed a range of 7 different Course Views including pedagogy profile and cost effectiveness (the others are course map, course dimensions, learning outcomes, task swim-lane, and course performance) and the Staffordshire ENABLE project is questioning its approach to market research prior to course development. Some of this work may of course be impacted in changes to business models depending on the outcome of the current debate on student fees.

The Bolton Coeducate project is the project that has been most active in this area over the last few months and is seeking to develop a business model based on [‘Open Learning’](#). They are looking at new business models for OER that allow for differential pricing for the support and accreditation options open to students. *‘The underlying proposition is that by allowing learners to choose the level of support they need or can afford, it will make access to higher education a possibility for people who would otherwise be disenfranchised by student fees.’*

### Open learning business model



The approach is described in a number of scenarios:

**Learner A:** a well qualified a self-organised learner who has identified the need to learn about a specific business process access and uses resources independently, joining in online conversations both hosted by the university and in special interest groups when they feel the need to so do.

The University earns no money from this learner but other learners benefit from their contributions to online activities.

**Learner B:** is working full-time and has 120 L4 credit from a first year studying at a University some years ago. Confident in their ability to learn, unable to afford to pay for study, they work through open learning modules undertaking formative assessments and evaluations as they progress. When they feel confident in themselves that they are capable of passing an assessment they apply to be examined on that module paying a relatively modest fee for a portfolio of evidence to go through the APEL process or for a written examination to be sat.

The University earns income for assessment from this learner, this is significantly less than would be fees for traditional approaches but resource required is relatively low and the pricing reflects the cost to the institution and what the market will bear.

**Learner C:** is working full-time but in relatively low paid work. In an ideal world, they would choose to study full-time on campus but this is not a possibility. Instead they opt for a mixture of self-directed study and on topics of particular interest, attend lectures as their work allows.

The University earns income for assessment and for some support for this learner, this is somewhat less than would be fees for traditional approaches but resources required are determined and paid for by the student and they reflect the cost to the institution and what the market will bear.

Bolton recognises the need to consider potentially radical solutions to the changes ahead and it will be interesting to see how many others investigate similar approaches in the months to come.

**Approval and Review: The Relationship between Design and Delivery:** Whilst Bolton is being radical about its business models other are being no less radical about their approaches to curriculum approval and review. The Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Supporting Responsive Curricula (SRC) project has influenced the creation of a wide-ranging academic change initiative for 'Enhancing the Quality and Assessment for Learning' (EQAL). In the light of the process interdependencies discussed above, MMU decided that things had grown too convoluted over time and an overhaul of the entire undergraduate curriculum and associated processes was required. At the time of the last report this was giving rise to some uncertainty about the impact on SRC project scope and whether plans may change again in the light of external factors. MMU Vice-Chancellor has since reaffirmed the importance of EQAL in the light of the Browne Report and CSR and the project team is delighted that this provides the opportunity to embed employability across the entire curriculum '*... the new EQAL programme and unit specification focuses tutors on meeting eight institution wide graduate competencies and mapping learning outcomes and assessments to them. There remain a variety of approaches to skills and competencies across the subject strands and, whilst it's clear that one size will not fit all, we need to find away of collating and disseminating the project experiences in this area.*'

The BCU T-SPARC project has achieved a major milestone with the University Senate formally approving a proposal for new approval mechanisms informed by the baseline review. The revisions represent a significant departure from the previous arrangements with the traditional validation event being replaced by a process during which an Academic Moderator oversees an iterative development phase informed by stakeholder engagement with learners and employers and where reflection on the design is evidenced by multimedia artefacts using a wide range of capture technology. The key features of the new process are identified as:

- Robust stakeholder engagement in the curriculum design process is built in and verifiable.
- New emphasis on the design process with new opportunities for formative dialogue with externals throughout the design process.
- Absence of a panel event prevents undue near-exclusive focus on production of documentation packs for scrutiny.

The link between design and delivery as viewed in terms of the relationship between approval and review processes has emerged as a key area for further work in a number of projects. BCU wants to see this as a continuum and is also interested in *Bridging the design spaces between curriculum design levels – programme, module and session.* Other institutions would like to streamline the processes for making minor modifications in order to ensure that course documentation is actually kept up to date and reflects the realities of delivery.

Strathclyde, in its previous report expressed the views of a number of projects: *'An important insight guiding current thinking concerns the relationship between the approval and review processes. Currently, programmes and modules are approved before any delivery has occurred with the result that significant changes from the approval plan are likely during first delivery. The project is exploring a potential new approach to approval and review in which newly-approved courses and classes might be revisited after their first implementation, with data from a planned review fed back and used to update the programme/module descriptions. In this way, delivery and review become an ongoing iterative process in which information from review is fed back to enhance module/programme documentation and to provide a history of delivery and subsequent enhancements. ... This might be relevant to all HE institutions that see approval and review as part of a wider enhancement agenda.'*

Similar issues were being explored by the PALET project at Cardiff. The original focus of the project was to concentrate solely on the approval of entirely new programmes. Earlier this year it was agreed that in order to achieve maximum impact and benefit for the University, the scope of the project should be extended to include the development of new programmes, changes to existing programmes and the ongoing, yearly management of programme and module information. Interestingly Strathclyde's Steering Group has taken the opposite view and wishes to complete the existing process, with its focus on approval, using this to generate recommendations for future work. It will be interesting to compare the respective merits of the two approaches across these projects.

**Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement:** QA and QE have featured heavily as areas where the projects have sought assurance that radical approaches would not be penalised under the audit regime for England and Wales and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has actively engaged with the programme in order to discuss these issues and the possible outcomes of the review of the QAA Code of Practice.

A number of the project baseline reports showed that the institutions involved have robust QA processes but some of them worry that these processes inhibit agility. Examples include: the infrequency of validation boards meeting; quality cycles being out of synch with academic cycles and burdensome and duplicated paperwork. The opportunity to discuss the issues directly with QAA revealed that in many cases it is institutions themselves that safeguard these frameworks in the interests of 'quality assurance' rather than having them imposed by external agencies.

The discussions gave the projects increased confidence that they ought to encourage their institutions to showcase good and innovative practice during their audits. The phrase *'Never waste a good crisis'* was nonetheless used to describe how some projects had used less than favourable elements of past QAA reports to highlight the importance of the things they are tackling. QAA processes, albeit under a slightly different regime in Scotland, have also benefited the Strathclyde Principles in Patterns (PiP) project. During the Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process the ELIR team were positive about some of the solutions PiP was offering and the external perspective was helpful in securing institutional support for changes to the approval process.

The programme has engaged with the QAQE SIG in relation to the review of the Code or Practice and a toolkit entitled *'Harnessing Quality Assurance Processes to Enhance Technology Enabled Learning'*. Since our last set of discussions with QAA (October 2010) the Browne Report has of course suggested that the QAA should be merged with HEFCE, OFFA and OIA to form a new Higher Education Council. This is likely to result in a hiatus as regards implementing any outcomes of the Review. One thing that is however clear is that the work being undertaken by the projects in relation to Programme Specifications and Course Information is likely to be of increased significance in the future.

**Course Information/Representing the curriculum:** Helen Beetham summed up a set of issues that were evident in the baseline reviews as follows, *'Many problems with the management of course-related information can be put down to the fact that this is still a document-based rather than a data-based system (and paper-based at most institutions). This gives rise to duplication of effort and of information, lack of version control, poor re-use of relevant*

*information for different purposes, and a tendency for information to be designed for approval rather than any other purpose.'*

BCU's achievement in getting the go-ahead to implement an approval process that is concerned with capturing the 'lived experience' of curriculum design is thus a major milestone in the overall programme and progress will be watched with interest.

How to represent the curriculum in a way that can be reused to meet the needs of various stakeholders is the focus of a number of other projects most notably the Open University and the Strathclyde Principles in Patterns (PiP) project. The way in which Strathclyde is tackling the issue has aroused widespread interest across the programme as other institutions including Leeds Met and Cardiff have noted that the tendency for different faculties to store information in different forms and media can make it difficult to re-use. The PiP project has reviewed current documentation produced as part of class and course procedures and identified that:

- Fields on the current forms do not stimulate productive reflection about the educational design of classes and courses or about the student experiences they would promote.
- Fields in current forms do not stimulate reflection on how class and course provision aligns with institutional strategies and policies (e.g. graduate attributes, internationalisation etc.)
- The current forms give no advice to support design thinking, even, for example, simple advice on how to write learning outcomes.
- It is currently difficult to share examples of good practice across the university because there is no systematic collection of data about how classes and courses are designed and the current documentation does not support this.

The lack of any definitive list of data fields and definitions meant that the project had to undertake a considerable amount of work in order to identify a set of core data that could be exposed as part of a system to support good educational design. The team identified specific data fields relevant to the educational aspirations of the university and produced a number of revisions and additions to the existing forms. These changes draw on good educational practice as evidenced by published educational research and on relevant university educational principles and policies (e.g. assessment principles, graduate attributes, employability). The project is now piloting a set of workflow tools and supporting materials.

City University PREDICT project has run 60 workshops with staff across the University in recent months in order to make changes to programme and module specifications so that the information presented within them is student-facing. In many cases this has led to a clearer philosophy about the programme being outlined.

BCU is looking at new ways to provide information to students as the existing Student Handbook had become unwieldy. The information has been split into university level information now supplied via the website and a new Course Guide being piloted by a number of faculties. The Cardiff PALET project is also newly tasked with creating a standard Student Handbook for the institution..

Managing Information has also been a major theme of Staffordshire University's ENABLE project recently. The University was interested in exploring the potential of communicating information to students via mobile devices and analysis undertaken by the ENABLE project was able to demonstrate that the University's currently piecemeal handling of course related information constituted an almost insurmountable barrier to good provision of information to learners via these means. The realisation that the issues were information-related rather than technical (and the use of programme connections to show that Bradford and MMU face very similar problems) has resulted in the project being asked to propose ways forward.

A project in the related Curriculum Delivery programme is also of relevance here. Newcastle University's [Dynamic Learning Maps project](#) is using both 'semantic web' and, 'Web 2.0' approaches, building on established technologies and standards to provide 'mash-ups' of resources, curriculum information and personal learning records to meet diverse educational requirements, ranging from Personal Development Planning to assessment.

As noted above, all of these developments may be expected to take on increased significance under a new QA regime and increased demands for information to be provided to learners.

**Assessment:** This was a major focus of many of the Curriculum Delivery projects and is now featuring in a number of Design projects. The Ulster Viewpoints project has the strongest focus on assessment and has created and piloted a reflective [Assessment and Feedback](#) tool for staff with excellent results so far. The tool is based on [REAP](#) principles and is intended to inform, inspire and to help staff plan their assessment and feedback strategy.

City University has identified a need to support staff writing programme specifications to ensure that assessment criteria are clear and compatible with the learning outcomes and has run a number of workshops to this effect. As part of its revision of course documentation it is requiring much greater clarity for students about why specific approaches to learning and teaching are being used, development of assessment criteria for all assessments and their use in a range of approaches to giving feedback. This area was identified as a priority both from the University's review of Undergraduate education but also through the National Student Survey results.

Anyone interested in this topic is invited to look also at the outcomes of Hertfordshire University's Effecting Sustainable Change in Assessment Practice and Experience ([ESCAPE](#)) project and the [Making Assessment Count](#) project at the University of Westminster both funded under the JISC Curriculum Delivery Programme. City University and Greenwich are both involved (along with others) in piloting the [Making Assessment Count](#) approaches to deliver further benefits realisation from the Curriculum Delivery programme.

## 5c Stakeholders

The projects have been conscious from the start of the need for effective stakeholder engagement and have very well thought out strategies.

BCU's [Ladder of Engagement](#) model has informed its thinking throughout the project and has been influential in helping other projects clarify their approaches. The team has also been very conscious of the need to make its outputs accessible to the widest possible range of stakeholders and has taken an innovative approach to creating informative and engaging [videos](#) whilst seeking to preserve the anonymity of some stakeholder views. In its latest report the team again demonstrates a really positive approach to maintaining good relationships with stakeholders by feeding back to them exactly how their involvement has fed into institutional decisions: *'By way of feeding back to all of those stakeholders who have engaged with us over the development of new approval methods, we have taken the proposal document as ratified by Senate, converted it to HTML using Wimba Create and added hyperlinks to the key features of the process. These hyperlinks link to the data we collected through the engagement events (such as the Wordle images and photographs taken of the annotated process maps) enabling us to demonstrate to our stakeholders how the final ratified process reflects their needs as shared in our engagement events.'*

### Staff

We noted last time the importance of projects having an appropriate Sponsor who can influence all of the areas targeted by the project goals. A number of the projects have had to, or are in the process of having to, engage with new Sponsors as a result of changes in institutional senior management teams. So far all appear to have been successful in gaining support and aligning their goals and activities to the current needs and priorities of the institution.

Whilst the impact of the economic recession was already being felt when the last reports were written it was not always evident that staff saw technology as offering positive ways to combat these effects. Given the uncertainty of the climate many staff were viewing innovation as 'too risky' and indeed immediate operational pressures were inhibiting them spending time of new activities. It was also the case that, even in such straightened times, enrolment targets were being met and some of the project targets of delivering flexible and work-related learning were seen as far from mainstream. There are fewer such references in the current set of reports. This is probably down to widespread understanding that new business models are inevitable. How easily such understanding will however translate into acceptance of new models remains to be seen. Indeed one project referred to *'threats in terms of stakeholder buy-in if the project is wrongly associated with ideological values that underpin the CSR.'*

City University's PREDICT project is one that has undergone a significant shift in emphasis over the last two years. The project started out with the title *'Process Re-engineering Design for an Interdisciplinary Curriculum with Technology'*. Although the project acronym is unchanged the name has been revised to *'Promoting Realistic Engaging Discussions In Curriculum Teams'* which emphasises the part that stakeholder engagement has played in changing the focus from processes much more to conversations. The project is now very heavily skewed toward effecting change through staff development.

The other project that has staff development as its main focus is Ulster's Viewpoints project. The tools already developed and being piloted to good effect now cover: [Assessment and Feedback](#), [Information Skills](#), Learner Engagement and Creativity and Innovation.

Interestingly the T-SPARC Project Manager, Paul Bartholomew, now has responsibility for academic staff development at BCU. As he also holds the University brief to lead on Curriculum Design the joining up of these work streams allows for tight integration between the identification of the needs associated with curriculum design and the development of support to address those needs.

The OULDI (Open University Learning Design Initiative) project is approaching staff development in a different way by creating a community of practice around its [Cloudworks](#) site which now has 3,358 registered users.



develop and promote the tools have proven so popular that they are now seen as integral to the success of the project and the project scope has been amended to encompass both the tools and workshop elements.

Greenwich University UG-Flex project is basing its developments on the Sungard Banner student record system. Code is being written to cater for additional data requirements and associated new database objects to store and facilitate manipulation of data for tracking a programme as it moves through its validation & review cycle. The UG-Flex project is currently analysing options for building further additional functionality in Banner to accommodate a wider range of registration, assessment and progression points available to students across the academic year. The project is committed to sharing its developments with other users of this proprietary system.

The Cloudworks site is an essential element of the Open University's OULDI (OU Learning Design Initiative) project. Cloudworks is a social networking site for finding, sharing and discussing learning and teaching ideas and designs. The site readily exceeded its target number of users and now has 3358 registered users. The project's most recent development is the release of CloudEngine, the code that drives Cloudworks, under an open-source licence. It is a new kind of open participatory and social software for discussing and aggregating ideas and resources. It is based around the notion of 'social objects' surrounded by a social space for discussion. These social objects can be cumulatively and collectively improved.

Interest continues to grow in Archi, a free, open source, cross-platform tool to create ArchiMate models released by JISC CETIS. Archimate is an open and independent Enterprise Architecture modelling language that supports the description, analysis and visualization of architecture within and across business domains. Interest in the potential usefulness of Archimate to the Curriculum Design projects has been hindered by the entry cost of tools designed for Archimate modelling. Archi is aimed at newcomers to Archimate who do not necessarily aim to become experienced modellers but simply to be able to borrow and apply techniques or Architecture modelling in piecemeal (often opportunistic) fashion.

The BCU T-SPARC project is making innovative use of a wide range of 'capture' technologies including Flip cameras and Voxur units to engage stakeholders and ensure that course design artefacts reflect the authentic 'lived experience' of the design process. It is also making use of its Mahara e-portfolio tool to publish the outcomes. It is also developing a Sharepoint infrastructure to facilitate and automate the workflow associated with the sharing of definitive documentation and the various sign-offs along the way.

Staffordshire ENABLE project is carrying out an external examiner 'mini-project' looking at streamlining business processes through data sharing, document management and process automation. This will reduce duplication of effort in managing local collections of data and documents and speed up processes by removing some manual notification steps. The project has developed domain model classes and database mappings based on the XCRI CAP 1.1 spec and using the Hibernate persistence framework. The project describes the use of frameworks like Hibernate as being '*... analogous to using power tools. With some initial investment up front, the framework does a lot of the work and allows you to develop much more quickly on top of it. As always, this type of approach is essential for a micro development team like ours.*' The project is also using similar approaches in the TransAPEL mini-project, funded by the University's Sales and Student Recruitment department to produce a 'demand focussed' approach to APEL that does away for the need for the completion of APEL portfolios.

The best kept secret of the programme is the extent to which the participating institutions are sector pioneers in the field of Enterprise Architecture (EA). Cardiff, City, Bolton, Staffordshire and Leeds Met have all been participating in one or both of the JISC Strategic Technologies Group and EA Practice Group for some time. MMU realised the need for EA when it began to tackle the complexity of changing interdependent process as outlined in section 5b. The projects all however realise that trying to 'sell EA' as a big idea to senior managers is unlikely to meet with much success. They are instead being very pragmatic about using EA approaches to solve real problems (especially at Staffordshire) thus demonstrating the benefits in the hope that this will stimulate wider interest in the benefits of approach.

## 6 Transformation

There is no doubt that the project institutions, along with the rest of the sector, are currently undergoing transformation. The difficulty will come in attributing tangible changes to specific project interventions. This is never easy in the case of real transformation and is a particular challenge during a period of such upheaval.

It is encouraging therefore to see such real milestones of success as the BCU Senate approval of new processes, the MMU impact on EQAL and the increased scope for the PALET project at Cardiff. Other projects are evidencing their success more in terms of pervasiveness rather than process change such as the exponential growth in OULDI's Cloudworks users or the number of staff impacted by City's PREDICT project. For the projects such as those at Bolton, Leeds Met and Greenwich which are addressing new or expanding markets for their institutions it seems only a matter of time before the issues they are addressing move from marginal to mainstream and indeed we are already seeing evidence of this.

To some extent headings in this report such as 'staff development' probably do not reflect the cultural change ambitions of many of the projects. For example the work being undertaken by Strathclyde, Ulster and the OU to improve educational design, whilst it builds on what is good about existing practice, represents a massive cultural shift if it is to be embedded across the development of the whole curriculum and will have a transformational effect on the learner experience. Whilst early in the programme there may have appeared to be clear differences between those projects that were more pedagogically focused and those that were more concerned with institutional processes the changing climate, far from widening this gap, seems to be bringing the two closer together. The new business models, flexible learning opportunities and meeting the needs of new types of learner (and employer) need to be underpinned by sound institution-wide approaches to educational design if we are to provide a high quality, fit for purpose educational experience in a vastly different environmental context.

## 7 Summary

The projects have just reached their halfway point and it is immensely gratifying to see their growing list of achievements despite the difficulties caused by the current environment. It is to be hoped that their continued success will act as an inspiration to others at a time when, more than ever, the sector needs creativity and innovation founded on sound educational ideals.

Readers are encouraged to engage with the emerging project outputs via the [Design Studio](#) and a rich variety of project communications linked via the [Programme Blog](#).