



**Project Document Cover Sheet**

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Project Information			
<b>Project Acronym</b>	SRC		
<b>Project Title</b>	Supporting Responsive Curricula		
<b>Start Date</b>	1/9/08	<b>End Date</b>	31/5/12
<b>Lead Institution</b>	Manchester Metropolitan University		
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<b>Partner Institutions</b>			
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1.0	30/10/09	Issued to JISC
1.1	17/12/09	Minor update before wider release

# Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme

## Interim Reporting Template

<b>Project Name</b>	<i>Supporting Responsive Curricula – Manchester Metropolitan University</i>
<b>Report compiled by</b>	<i>Peter Bird</i>
<b>With contributions from</b>	<i>Mark Stubbs and SRC project team</i>
<b>Reporting period</b>	Project start - October 2009
<b>Section One: Summary</b>	
<p>The focus of the project over its first year has been to baseline existing processes and try to define what is meant by curriculum responsiveness. In terms of baselining, the focus has been on the programme approval processes in order that all key stakeholders have a shared understanding of our quality assurance processes and the institution can start to make changes based from that shared understanding. A key feature of the work on reviewing the quality assurance has been the use of process modelling methodology and tools, which has really helped by in effect creating a neutral 'third-party' view of the system and is going to facilitate making changes that will improve its overall agility.</p> <p>For responsiveness, the project has undertaken a series of workshops and meeting with all the stakeholders including academics, students, employers, professional bodies, university executives, middle managers and support staff. "Responsiveness" was seen in terms of listening and responding in a timely fashion to students, employers, other stakeholders, market opportunities and internal policies. It also involved responding to changes in current trends in teaching and emerging content. Supporting the employability of students was also seen as important.</p> <p>A more responsive curriculum was characterised in a variety of ways: flexibility; streamlined documentation; more transparent processes for review, greater involvement by students in review process, better communication, clearer lines of responsibility, a holistic view that overrides individual units, and a better distributed sense of ownership were all mentioned. Stronger connections with employers and work-based learning, shared ownership between academic departments, better integrated systems and more effective use of formative evaluation of units were also valued highly.</p> <p>The key deliverables for the project have been the baseline report and the detailed project plan. Now that this baselining activity is complete, the next stage of the project is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop initiatives within the four subject areas of Accounting, Creative Digital., Law and Physiotherapy which will start to make their curriculum more responsive.</li><li>• Continue to review the quality assurance process with a view to developing more agile process, which can be contrasted with the benchmark position and tested by supporting new curriculum initiatives in the four subject areas.</li></ul>	
<b>Section Two: Activities and Progress</b>	

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The main activities have been the development of the baseline report and working with the subject strands to develop workplans for the next year of the project. There have been no significant change to the project plan to date but it is likely to require changes within the next three months as the project re-evaluates what can be achieved. For example, it seems clear that apart from in Physiotherapy, there is no obvious strong desire from employers and professional bodies to use e-portfolios so we may need to alter our approach to take account of this for the other three subject areas of Law, Accounting and Creative Digital.

In terms of project staff, the project has a new project manager (Peter Bird) and for the Creative Digital stream, David Bird has been replaced by Nicola Critchlow although David's skills remain available to the project in an advisory role.

The Steering group has met twice and is chaired by the deputy Vice-Chancellor which indicates the importance of the project to the university. The project is linked to a number of other initiatives which aim to revise the programme approval process, develop IT systems which will support curriculum activities and increase employability outcomes for graduates. As well as reviewing the SRC deliverables and work plans, the steering group will review SRC's relationship with other university projects to ensure that SRC's new initiatives have a greater chance of becoming embedded in the curriculum process. The Steering Group has also invited an external representative (Judy Smith from the Higher Education Academy) to join the Steering Group to give an external view of the project progress.

### Section Three: Outputs and Deliverables

The following table summarises the types of output that the project will produce

Output	Details	Audience
Key Messages	What are the main issues in developing a responsive curricula	Internal through the project and External through JISC, JISC Design Studio and dissemination events
Process Models	Models representing an agile curriculum development process	Internal through the project and External through JISC, JISC Design Studio and dissemination events
Competencies	Generic competencies that can be mapped to the curricula and have been developed through stakeholder discussion and input.	Internal, External through JISC and interaction with employers and professional bodies
Evaluation	How the project has improved responsiveness within MMU	Internal in order to promote embedded change and external through JISC and dissemination events and conferences

During this reporting period the only significant deliverable has been the baseline report. This contains some of the key issues that changing the curriculum development process will have to solve, process models which describe the current system, and initial attempt to define what responsiveness means to the various stakeholders.

### Section Four: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

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*The baselining activity has highlighted a number of key issues and challenges with curriculum design at MMU. These are:*

The programme review, validation and modification processes have been documented and reviewed. This review concluded that processes are rigorous and close attention is paid to standards, benchmarking and equivalences. The processes are clearly established and applied consistently across the University. However, the processes are complex and this can make it difficult for a wide range of staff to engage with them, creating a dependence on quality assurance experts. There is also a high dependence on manual checking of the documentation by the programme team, the Faculty administration and the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement and this is costly. New approaches to fast tracking single units or collections of units that need to be validated quickly have been established within the Business School (Executive Programme) and Hollings (Open Professional Programme) and other faculties are looking to adopt similar approaches. There might be opportunity to use these fast-tracking approaches as a baseline to change the whole system.

Development of an academic database (for fine grain, electronic version control of curriculum, together with a process for creating associated workflows) would facilitate progress on changing quality assurance processes. Even without any cultural change to the existing programme approval process, there would be significant time and effort savings if the reliance on paper documentation were removed. However there are a number of stakeholders in a curriculum database: academics, quality assurance staff, students, professional bodies, employers, administrators and marketing staff, each with both different and overlapping requirements. The lack of mature software products to satisfy these requirements is not only a problem within MMU but the recent JISC Curriculum Design and Delivery Programme Event has shown it to be a common problem across the sector. A specification of these requirements will be a key focus for the project in the next six months

In some courses, professional bodies are really the ultimate authority of the quality assurance but also university quality assurance has a role and may introduce extra modifications. Staff feel that this causes significant additional time and cost without adding significant value. This is another area that could be examined in order that there is clear policy for these types of course with a clear definition of the relationship between University QA and Professional Body QA.

Whilst there is further work to do on working with employers, there are obvious pockets of good practice within the university where we are working with professional bodies and employers to find work placement opportunities and raising the employability profile of our students (e.g. in Accounting and Physiotherapy). There is a need to make the curriculum more accessible to employers both in terms of content which they can relate to and also speed of production of course documentation given the complexities of the approval and assurance processes.

Finally, there is a mixed view of the significance of e-portfolios. In subjects such as physiotherapy this is becoming a maturing requirement supported by the professional body but in other subjects the need is less developed and the views of employers are not well-defined. It is also clear that universities could not afford to support commercial e-portfolios products on a universal scale for life so there is a need for open-source, personally-owned and lighter touch solutions.

The SRC project will try to address these issues by partnering as necessary to:

- Develop a requirements specification for an academic database which meets the needs of all the stakeholders –possibly in consultation with other Curriculum Design projects as these requirements ought to be common across the sector.
- Produce a revised quality assurance methodology based on open-professional programme approach which can be benchmarked by using the four SRC subject strands to pilot curriculum changes through the new process
- Continue work with employers and professional bodies to discover competencies which enable students to develop and evidence skills which increase their employability chances.
- Look at the issue of competencies in the four subject strands of Creative Digital, Law, Accounting and Physiotherapy and develop ways to standardise these competencies so that we don't have a proliferation of similar competencies.
- Develop further measures of responsiveness perhaps in collaboration with the project cluster.

In terms of measuring changes to the curriculum design process the steering group has recommended that our quality assurance team collect statistics on the existing process over the next year and these can be used to assess improvements against benchmark data

### **Section Five: Communications and Dissemination Activities**

In terms of external events, the project has:

- Participated in a poster presentation event at the HEA conference in Manchester in July
- Presented at CSP Congress in Liverpool on work in Physiotherapy with E-portfolios see [www.cspcongress.co.uk](http://www.cspcongress.co.uk)
- Run a number of events which engage with employers and professional bodies including ProDev days with Manchester digital (Creative Digital), health employers and the CSP (Physiotherapy) and the Solicitors Regulatory Authority (Law).

In terms of forthcoming events:

- The project has organized a half-day conference to be held 5<sup>th</sup> November to promote the project internally
- Mark Stubbs and Peter Bird presented lessons from the project at the JISC online e\_learning conference on 26,27 November

### **Section Six: Evaluation**

It is too early to reflect on the overall evaluation plan as the main activity has been baselining. The workshops held with staff, students, employers and professional bodies have been very effective and have helped to focus both the steering group and the staff within the four subject strands. The feedback from the workshops, despite some of the critical views of university administration and delivery, was seen as valuable and the steering group decided to share the results with the institutional auditors who are undertaking an audit this autumn.

The first of our consolidation events will be held on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2009. We have invited Professor Freda Tallantyre from the HEA to be the keynote speaker and Fleur Corfield from Staffordshire University (one of our cluster partners) to talk about their employer engagement experience. The main purpose of the event is to publicise the work of SRC internally within MMU and seek input in planning the next stage of the project.

### **Section Seven: Issues and Challenges**

The main challenges for the project come in three forms:

- There have been delays in the progress of the Programme Approval review, which is key to SRC in producing a more agile quality assurance process. This is in part due to absence of the department head during the reporting period. A new head of department has been recently appointed so our strategy is to offer support to the department to get this activity back on track.
- Development of a curriculum database (see above) would facilitate progress on the programme approval process. We are escalating this within the university but also looking at other strategies based on Sharepoint and open-source that would allow both SRC to achieve its objectives and also bootstrap a curriculum database into MMU that could have sector-wide benefits.
- It is clear that HEFCE funding to Higher Education is being reduced in the current economic crisis and this may impact activities which SRC depend on. It is too early to tell what these impacts will be.

In terms of engaging with stakeholders, the workshops we have held have proved very effective and we plan to hold more over the life of the project. Particularly effective are the ProDev days we are holding with the Manchester Digital organization where we bring together academics, students and employers in a single event: the next will be on November 4: see <http://prodevday.wordpress.com/>

**Section Eight: Collaboration and Support**

The collaboration with the project cluster is very productive and has resulted in several activities between ourselves and cluster members, independent of the project meetings. We have an effective cluster and a supportive critical friend. The relationship with the programme manager is supportive and productive and we have attended several meetings where we interacted with other curriculum design and delivery projects.

One example of collaboration with cluster partners is on a recent visit by a representative of University South Queensland (USQ) to MMU. The USQ representative had led a curriculum review project, which had addressed many of the issues that SRC is dealing with. We were able to invite a representative from the Staffordshire Enable project to share the day with USQ and this may lead to future collaboration which will benefit both institutions and JISC's curriculum design programme overall.

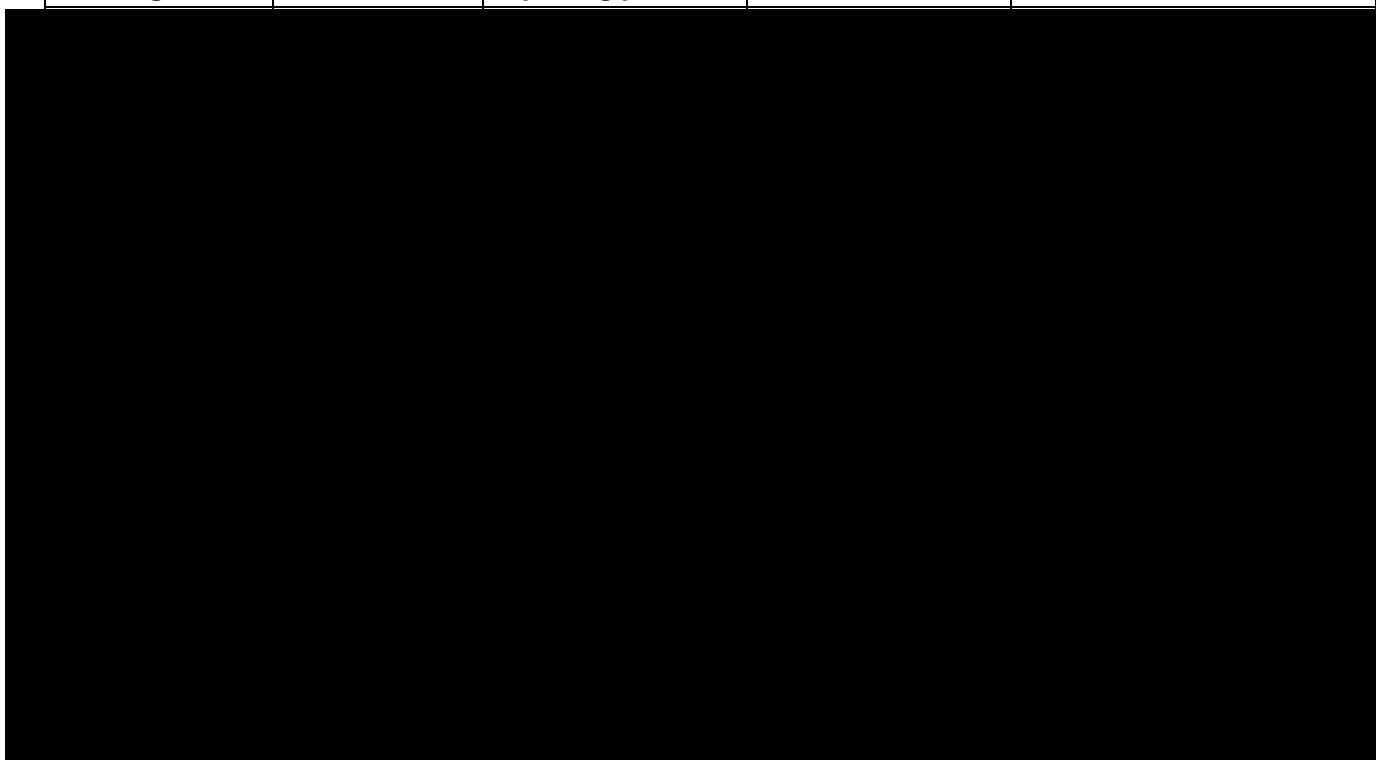
We would like to make one comment to help JISC in the overall programme management. JISC is trying hard to ensure that curriculum design and delivery projects share outputs at the earliest opportunity. Whilst this is a sensible goal, which we support, there is a danger that it may cause overload of information that at this stage of the projects is somewhat immature. With the programme meetings, posters, videos, design studio and mapping tool it may be difficult for individual institutions to be able to synthesize the information to extract the relevant messages.

**Section Nine: Financial Statement**

*In this section you should detail the expenditure of the project so far. Against the budget headings you should set out the expenditure for the reporting period, noting any significant over/under spend giving reasons for this. You should also state the total expenditure to date against each budget heading. The table below is designed to help this reporting process. Additional budget headings may be added to fit an individual project's budget. Projects may find it more appropriate to use a spreadsheet to report financial information.*

<b>Total Grant</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>Duration of project</b>	<b>3 years 9 months</b>
<b>Reporting Period</b>	<b>September 08 to July 09 (July is the last reporting quarter that the MMU finance system can give data for as of October 30 2009)</b>		

<b>Budget Headings</b>	<b>Total budget allocated</b>	<b>Expenditure this reporting period</b>	<b>Total expenditure to date</b>	<b>Further information</b>
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## Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme

### Checklist:

Before you return this report:

- Ensure that your project webpage on the JISC site is up to date and contains the correct information. Attach details of any required amendments to this report. Project webpages can be found from: [www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdesign](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdesign)
- If there have been any changes to the original project plan and/or work packages, ensure that amended copies of the relevant sections of your project plan are attached to this report.
- Identify and name any areas within this report that you'd like removed before the report is made public (see below)

**\*Please note** the interim reports will be made available on the JISC website and on the Circle site with the budgetary information removed. We recognise that projects may occasionally address very sensitive issues. We would like you to present as full a picture in this report as you can as the lessons you learn are valuable to us. We assure you that any issues you identify as confidential are removed before the report is made public. Where such issues do represent valuable lessons for the community we will involve you in further discussion as to how they could be passed on without identifying institutions or individuals.