

Innovation in the Market Assurance of new Programmes

i-MAP Project

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Innovation in the market Assurance of New Programmes i-MAP Project

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Glossary

The i-MAP project has deployed and devised terms that may be open to interpretation and thus the following definitions are provided to avoid misunderstanding:

Module: A unit of study that is assigned a specific number of academic credits that contributes to the achievement of an award (in some countries this is referred to as a course).

Course: A combination of units or modules leading to a full academic award, typically a Masters degree or a Bachelors degree. In the documentation the terms programme and course are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Programme: A combination of units or modules leading to a full academic award, typically a Masters degree or a Bachelors degree. In the documentation the terms programme and course are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Type A Course: A new course or programme introduced by a higher education provider that is new to the institution but is widely available across the UK sector as a whole.

Type B Course: A new course or programme introduced by a higher education provider that is innovative and thus has few if any directly competitive courses across the UK sector as a whole.

HEI: A university or other Higher Education Institution.

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Executive Summary

The successful development and launch of new programmes is a vital activity for Higher Education. The financial sustainability of universities is dependent on recruiting sufficient numbers of students to innovative and excellent academic programmes. The i-MAP project set out to review the new programme development and launch processes within universities and to determine if there was any scope for improved efficiency.

The project found evidence of successful development of new programmes across the sector. However, analysis of UCAS and HESA data revealed that the majority of new programmes failed to attract sufficient numbers of applicants. In addition, “instant success” was highly predictive of sustained success. Contrary to common perception, starting with very low levels of admissions and then growing to viable numbers has been uncommon.

The sector can no longer afford to waste the development costs of new programmes that are unsuccessful after launch. The project determined that a crucial factor influencing the future success of a new programme is the application of robust market intelligence to the business case underlying the proposal. Key recommendations of the i-MAP project are that new programme development should be a staged process, using early financial and market scrutiny, and that senior leaders should be prepared, where appropriate, to stop proposals progressing into full development.

A further key finding is that successful new programme development is dependent on the well-orchestrated contributions of a variety of staff including academics and staff from estates, marketing, admissions, finance and quality. The project recommends that senior leaders should consider how best to promote, support, reward and encourage cross-boundary working both between academic subjects (in order to support innovative, inter-disciplinary programmes) and also between academics and professional support staff (in the process of new programme development).

In the time that the project was conducted, the higher education landscape changed dramatically. The Project Board are confident that universities will find benefit to considering the recommendations contained in this report. It is our hope that the adoption of these recommendations will improve the financial sustainability of the sector by enabling a greater proportion of new programmes to achieve strong and sustained market appeal.

Professor Paul Coyle

On behalf of the i-MAP Project Board, including
Professor Geoffrey Channon, University of the West of England
Karen Innis, Leeds University
Dave Roberts, The Knowledge Partnership

1 Introduction

The genesis of the i-MAP project was a meeting of Pro Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors convened by the Higher Education Academy in 2009. The event focused on the management by universities of their portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

Consideration was given as to whether the Higher Education sector could be more effective in developing new programmes and take a more market-led approach. Arising from this discussion a small group of partners submitted a successful bid to HEFCE's Leadership Governance and Management Fund to deliver the i-MAP project which aimed to support:

- 1) More efficacious programme development and, therefore, reduced incidences of failure by HEIs to recruit viable cohorts of students.
- 2) Improved financial sustainability in the sector due to a greater proportion of new programmes achieving strong and sustained market appeal.
- 3) A more collaborative approach between academics and other professionals (e.g. marketing, quality, HR) to new programme development.
- 4) Initiation of networks of HE staff with common interests in course development.

The evidence base for the project includes:

- a) A project initiation seminar at UCAS attended by 30 HEIs and including external speakers and service innovation experts.
- b) A baseline survey in Spring 2010 to create an understanding of current practice across 60 HEIs.
- c) Analysis of UCAS and HESA data to assess both the incidence and success of new courses.
- d) A literature review of the fields of new product development, culture change and new course development.
- e) Visits to 3 partner and 9 associate HEIs involving 15 days spent on campus meeting institutional leaders, academics and professional support departments engaged in programme development.
- f) A national UK conference in autumn 2011 held in London and attended by 85 delegates.

Overall 80 different HEIs participated in the project by attending one of the above events, by providing data, completing the baseline survey or being a project member.

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

Four partners formed the i-MAP project board:

1. University for the Creative Arts
2. The Knowledge Partnership
3. University of Leeds
4. University of the West of England

Many more institutions applied to be Associate Partners than it was possible to involve in the visits to institutions. The Associates were selected to represent different types of institutions and locations. A primary consideration was leadership commitment to the project at the highest level. The Associate Partners were:

- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Chester
- University of Lincoln
- University of Northampton
- University of Portsmouth
- Newman University College
- University of Wales, Newport
- Staffordshire University
- University of Sussex

The contribution of the Associates was invaluable to securing valid project outcomes.

2 Cost of New Programme Development

New programme development in Higher Education is both an extensive and costly activity. New programme development and associated portfolio management is a critical issue for most HEIs because:

- a) Successful programmes are increasingly important to the financial health of institutions.
- b) Unsuccessful programmes consume valuable resources that could be deployed more effectively to achieve other goals or support more successful programmes.

The i-MAP project found evidence of HEIs developing successful new programmes but also identified a need for revisions to the current programme development processes. One of the criteria the project considered was how much resource is being expended on new programme development. Participants in the project were able to present examples of models which attribute costs to the delivery of programmes. These models and the associated issues are not dissimilar to those identified in the HEFCE Management Information Portfolio work related to optimising programme efficiency and course costing.

However, it was less common for the costs of developing courses to be recognized, understood or resourced.

Based on an analysis of UCAS data, and the estimates from HEIs regarding the indicative cost of developing new full-time undergraduate degree courses, the project estimates that the sector could have been spending of the order of £200m per year on new programme development.

It is recommended that universities should devise their own models for costing the development of new programmes, creating financial models appropriate to their individual contexts and processes.

The aim would be to control the development costs but also to avoid unnecessary costs e.g. those associated with developing new programmes which fail after launch.

A major part of the project was, therefore, to establish the level of success and failure following the launch of new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

ESTIMATING COSTS OF DEVELOPING NEW PROGRAMMES

The cost estimates devised by i-MAP are based on the information given by those responding to the baseline survey; costs were averaged and multiplied by the average number of new programmes developed in the sector per year.

Investment in new staff or facilities to offer the programme and the cost of delivery were excluded.

It is acknowledged that this estimate of the costs involved is just that, an estimate based on opinions and one that does not precisely account for every issue (e.g. that a new programme design may partly be based on existing modules). Nevertheless, a significant scale of resource is spent by the sector to develop new programmes.

HEFCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PORTFOLIO

Further information on this HEFCE project, including course costing, can be found at

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/lgm/trac/toolsandguidance/managementinformationprojects/>

3 Success Rate for New Undergraduate Programmes

As the ultimate goal of the project was to improve the success rate of new course development, a logical starting point was to make an assessment of the current level of success. The survey and case study evidence shows that HEIs use a variety of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the contribution of both new and established courses.

Amongst these, a universal criterion for evaluating new course proposals is the likelihood of recruiting a viable cohort; the project used this to assess success rates for new courses. Many HEIs set minimum target numbers for the student enrolments that new programmes need to demonstrate they will secure. These targets are not always directly linked to a robust analysis of financial sustainability. However, the minimum targets set by HEIs fell within a range of 15-30 for undergraduate degrees.

The baseline survey showed that most HEIs (75%) judged that a clear majority of their new programmes were successful.

Analysis of UCAS data indicated that in reality the rate of success (using the student recruitment KPI) had been much lower than the sector perceived it to be.

Only 10% of the new single subject degree programmes covered by the analysis managed to recruit at least 10 to 15 students.

This has obvious implications for the role of market analysis in assessing whether there is a market for a new course concept, and for describing its scale and structure.

There was strong evidence that new degree courses either succeed almost immediately (within the first two cycles) or not at all. Only very rarely did a new course that received fewer than 15 acceptances in the first complete admissions cycle then subsequently grow to achieve at least 15 acceptances in later cycles.

This clearly indicates that remedial marketing (unless it involves serious redesign and repositioning) is unlikely to be effective.

UCAS DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis covered new programmes introduced through UCAS during the period 2005-2008. This length of time was chosen to ensure that a new programme was active in enough cycles subsequent to introduction of a programme to be able to reflect on its success, or otherwise. During the period analysed, 18,137 new programmes were introduced in England and Wales, of which 4,149 (23%) were classified by the project as single subject and 13,988 (77%) classified as joint or combined. This equates to an average of roughly 10 new single subject programmes per HEI per year.

The success of new degree programmes was evaluated using data on 1,703 courses within three selected subject groups – (C) Biological Sciences, (H) Engineering and (W) Creative Arts and Design. The programmes were delivered across 106 HEIs.

The project also evaluated the full-time recruitment success of all degree programmes across all subject groups using HESA 2010 entry data.

4 Understanding the Market

The project explored possible reasons for the failure of new programmes. Programme titles were widely cited as a critical success factor by project participants, who recommended avoiding long or complex programme titles, or using terms likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience. The project recommends that universities should research and test the choice of a programme title. Titles should succinctly communicate the programme content and be easily understood by the target audience.

However, a more crucial factor identified as influencing the future success of a new programme is the application of market intelligence to the business case underlying the proposal for a new programme. Universities need to confirm that there is a well-defined market for the new programme at the concept stage.

Market considerations should also consider:

- Is the new programme targeting a market that is distinct from those occupied by other courses in the same institution?
- Is the new programme entering a field where the university has a weak reputational base?

A key recommendation of the project is that universities should make use of market intelligence early in the new programme development process. The key benefits of this approach would be to make early judgements about whether proposed new programmes are supported by the available external intelligence. Universities should exercise their option not to develop proposals into a full programme and, thus avoid incurring wasteful development costs of programmes for which there is an insufficient market. If the sector spends anywhere of the order of £200m a year on new programme development and 90% of new programmes are unsuccessful after launch then the sector may be able to achieve efficiencies of the order of £180m a year.

The i-MAP project judges that there would be significant benefits to adopting a Project Management approach to new programme development with a staged process, using early financial and market scrutiny.

A staged approach to new programme development should include a clear understanding of the information requirements for each stage and define who has the decision-making authority at each point (faculty/school, central committee or executive).

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH CASE STUDY

The University of Portsmouth researches and tests the titles of both proposed courses and existing programmes.

IS NEW A SELLING POINT?

It is tempting to promote a course as NEW given that this is widely considered to be an attractive feature with the connotation of being contemporary etc. However, there is some evidence in higher education that NEW is perceived by prospective students and their supporters as a risk. Students can sometimes see NEW as a negative – untried, untested, work in progress, etc. A new course has no track record and thus needs to borrow reputational assets from its host subject, department or university brand. A new programme which lacks student and alumni advocates needs to solicit and deploy others to act on its behalf. There can be greater uncertainty regarding the benefits of enrolling onto a new course in terms of jobs, social esteem, parental acceptance, etc.

5 Success Rate for New Postgraduate Programmes

HEIs were less confident about the success rate achieved by new postgraduate courses than new undergraduate degrees. In many HEIs the minimum target for student enrolments range from 10-15 for postgraduate courses. The objectives for developing postgraduate taught courses may legitimately be broader than for undergraduate provision e.g. building the next cohort of research students.

56% of the new programmes within the three subject areas the project studied failed to recruit 10 or more students in any active cycle. This was broadly consistent across all three subject groups.

Analysis revealed that 19% of courses successfully recruited 10 or more students in each of three consecutive cycles (a measure of sustained success). Of these courses, 9 in 10 had recruited at least 10 students within their first available admission cycle.

Therefore “instant success” is highly predictive of sustained success. Starting with low levels of admissions and then growing to viable numbers was uncommon. The project recommends that Universities keep the success of courses under review in the early years of their delivery.

The geographic pattern of recruitment has important consequences for both course marketing and the data used to evaluate the market for new course proposals.

Even for the most successful programmes, recruitment of home UK students to new postgraduate courses tends to be from the local and contiguous regions. Only a minority of elite institutions achieve significant recruitment on a more national basis.

Using data for 2010 entry the project analysed full-time student admission data for all UK based taught courses so as to place the success rate of new courses into wider context.

- 43% of all postgraduate courses recruited more than 10 students in 2010; 31% recruited more than 15.
- The median full-time student enrolments on postgraduate courses was 12.
- The top 20 percent of courses recruited 63% of all students; the top 30 percent of courses recruited 75%.

HESA DATA ANALYSIS

3,890 new PGT courses were evaluated across Biological Sciences (C), Engineering (H) and Creative Arts & Design (W). The analysis covered 2002-2008.

In 2008, 45% of the total courses offered across the three subject groups had been introduced since 2002, indicating that proportionately a very high level of new course development had taken place.

The data held by both UCAS and HESA did not immediately lend itself to an analysis of the success or not of new programmes. Considerable ‘cleaning’ of the data was needed. Both HESA and UCAS could make small changes to their data collection, storage and retrieval operations which could support the sector to monitor and thus improve programme success rates.

6 Launching New Programmes

The timing of when a new course is introduced to the market has a strong impact on success. Some HEIs have a strict timetable which plots each stage of development in a timeline working back from the critical marketing dates, such as prospectus publication deadlines. However, i-MAP found evidence that the timetable for new course development is sometimes not aligned with the recruitment cycle, so the timing of entry into the market becomes sub optimal; being too late for the UCAS application deadlines was an often cited example.

There is a perceived pressure to develop new programmes quickly and “go to market” in as short a timeframe as possible. Speed to market is often taken to be an indicator of innovation, enterprise and responsiveness. Late entry into the market is in part a function of this speed to market imperative but also reflects weak understanding in the sector about the impact of late market entry. There is little evidence that speed to market delivers success; the evidence points to a contrary conclusion.

The project recommends that senior leaders recognise that planning is important and make sure courses are not launched at the wrong time.

There should be rigorous scrutiny of proposals early in their development and senior leaders should be prepared where appropriate to stop proposals progressing into development as full new programmes or to hold them until an appropriate time for launch.

80% of the respondents to the baseline survey thought that the success rate of new courses would be improved if each had an associated launch plan. Planning for course promotion should ideally take place before the course is formally approved, thus enhancing the chances of a successful first cycle of recruitment.

The project found no evidence that Type A (new to the HEI) and Type B (innovative – new to the sector) courses are marketed differently despite the fact that Type A can succeed by winning market share whereas Type B can only succeed by stimulating new market demand.

GOOD PRACTICE IN PRODUCT LAUNCHES

The product and service development literature emphasised a number of key components to a formal journey from new product conception to launch:

- Agreed objectives and KPIs.
- Good analysis about the scale and nature of the target market including consideration of overseas markets.
- Competitor identification and analysis including cannibalisation threats.
- A stage-gate process (progress limited to concepts that meet pre agreed conditions).
- Clear procedures: tight specifications of roles and deliverables limiting ambiguity.
- A focus on the critical activities known to enhance success.
- Positive leadership but allied with delegated authority and encouragement.
- A willingness to accept and learn from occasional failures.

i-MAP recommend that HEIs use this checklist to help their self-reflection on the fitness for purpose of their new programme development processes.

7 Business Case

A broad conclusion from the project is that a much improved rate of success for new courses might flow from the implementation of a more robust screening of concept proposals and the application of more refined business case evaluation.

Three quarters of HEIs use an evaluation of the market as a required component within the business case and this is becoming more common and embedded. Post 92 universities and university colleges are more likely than their research intensive counterparts to evaluate the business case at an early stage in the process.

The application of robust market intelligence improves decision-making. However, confidence in the sector about both the validity and impact of market assessments is weak.

Further, whilst a more evidence-based approach brings many benefits and can be used to inform judgements, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that data is not used to make mechanistic decisions, as this may reflect a risk-averse culture and thus stifle innovation. However, taking decisions without data or secure market intelligence can constitute a serious risk.

Although costing models have improved, unrealistic costing of proposed courses was clearly evident and some documentation templates appeared to encourage this.

There is a good case for concluding that financial literacy amongst academics and marketeers is not that well developed. Requiring non-finance staff to build or assess the financial projections for a course is problematic. This is a good example of the collaboration needed between academics and staff likely to be located in a central finance unit.

The past record of the host department in launching programmes is rarely considered when evaluating the risks associated with approving a new programme and investing in its development. On an individual case basis this may not be significant but this intelligence may be important when building the institutional strategy.

It seems evident that a significant proportion of new programme proposals emanate from departments in declining markets as they seek a recruitment solution. A raft of failed developments may signal the need for a complete new model of provision to be considered.

APPLYING MARKET DATA

The baseline survey identified that 9 in 10 HEIs use data on applications and enrolments to validate that a market for a proposed course exists.

There is some debate about how much weight should be given to data that is “rear view mirror” in nature and reflects only achieved rather than latent or unformed markets.

Referencing data about the performance of similar courses is valid for assessing the probable success of Type A courses but Type B probably requires a wider basis for market intelligence using primary research supported planning and sufficient budget.

UNIVERSITY OF CHESTER CASE STUDY

University of Chester uses a 12 page planning document as the basis for a business case, followed by a Dragon’s Den style presentation by the academic proposer to the central panel.

UNIVERSITY OF WEST OF ENGLAND CASE STUDY

UWE uses business intelligence metrics to inform its new programme decision making and annual review.

8 Innovation in New Programmes

New course concepts, particularly those of a more innovative nature, originate primarily from academics.

Having engaged with academic programme developers across 12 universities the importance of having an academic champion for a new programme conclusively emerged as a critical success factor in its subsequent success. Such champions are particularly important to the success of new innovative Type B courses.

The key characteristics of effective academic champions included:

- Enthusiasm - as they are charged with converting the concept from the page to delivery.
- Well networked, even embedded, within the target market.
- An ability to demonstrate an understanding of the evolving nature of the graduate labour market, through contact with alumni, with graduate employers and applied research activity.

Clarity regarding who in the institution has the lead responsibility for stimulating new course ideas is currently not that evident. In our baseline survey, only 1 in 10 institutions considered new programme development to be a managed process led from the 'centre'.

Most HEIs have a process or set of processes in place to consider the case for individual new programme proposals at concept stage. Rarely is a gathered field of concepts evaluated in the round so as to locate the best prospects for investment. This is in part due to new concepts often emerging outside of any wider planning process.

Many universities rely exclusively on the paperwork to make decisions about whether or not to grant approval to proceed from proposal to full programme development. Often the academic champion is not visible to such decision-making committees, with the proposal often presented by another staff member e.g. the head of department.

INNOVATION & RISK

Innovative programme proposals can be seductive but carry more risk and cost; markets often need to be stimulated rather than share of an existing market won.

Engaging stakeholders in the development of innovative programmes can pay dividends and may also create a cadre of influential ambassadors.

Success is more likely if the number of Type B proposals in each HEI is limited at any one time so that resources can be focussed on those with the greatest potential.

Innovative TYPE B courses, like their more derivative Type A cousins, are just as likely to be an instant success or never a success. This suggests that innovative courses find a market that was already partially formed but not yet supplied. This indicates that it may be possible to gather some evidence of the potential market for TYPE B courses.

9 Collaboration Underpins Success

The evidence emerging from successful product innovators in the commercial sector stresses the importance of cross-functional teams in the journey from concept through iterative design and testing to successful market launch. Using the case study visits i-MAP tested the proposition that HEIs would benefit from a more collaborative approach to new programme development, deploying teams that cross hierarchical and professional boundaries.

Tensions were identified between the different perspectives needed for successful new programme development e.g. differences in the views of academics and marketing staff. Tensions were exacerbated if the contributions of different participants were not valued or if one point of view dominated another. Disputes could also be triggered by a lack of clarity of how data and external intelligence would be used to inform decision-making and judgements. i-MAP did not characterise these tensions as “academic versus professional support”. Rather i-MAP recommends that universities pay greater attention to the leadership challenges of enabling staff to work together across professional boundaries.

The project recommends that new programme development should be a collaborative process, recognising and enabling the contributions of a variety of staff including academics and staff from estates, marketing, international, recruitment, finance and quality.

Such a team-based approach can be successfully facilitated by a senior leader, at Pro Vice-Chancellor level or above, who can co-ordinate the work of the academics with the professional support staff. Those university leaders charged with managing this activity need to be able to facilitate/broker/ negotiate decisions and ensure difficult issues are faced and resolved. Recognising that there are many factors that encourage a silo mentality in universities, i-MAP recommends that HEIs should consider how best to promote, support, reward and encourage cross- boundary working both between academic subjects (in order to support innovative interdisciplinary programmes) and also between academics and professional support staff (in the process of new programme development). It is also noted that innovation tends to spring from regular face-to-face discussion and collaboration.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The Project undertook a literature survey examining the issues of leading collaborative teams and working across professional boundaries. This work informed the recommendations of the Project.

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

The UCLAN course development process advocates far closer collaboration between academic and professional staff, balancing a business assessment of new product ideas with the traditional assessment of academic quality.

UNIVERSITY FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS CASE STUDY

A Portfolio Planning Group successfully took the lead on new course development and overall portfolio management. Membership included senior academics and professional support departments.

10 Managing the Portfolio of Programmes

The I-MAP Project was originally focused on new programme development but it became clear that for best practice to be implemented this activity needed to take place within a wider portfolio management approach. There is evidence that many HEIs are seeking to rationalise the portfolio to bring clarity and efficiency. Around three quarters of HEIs declared a systematic process for reviewing the existing academic course portfolio; the case study visits reinforced this finding.

The factors that are most widely included in UK portfolio reviews of courses are financial viability and recruitment success (which are connected), the fit with the brand and vision of the university, and the performance of courses using NSS, graduate destination and student achievement data. However, portfolio decisions cannot be purely data driven, requiring judgement to be exercised by experienced teams of academics and professional support staff.

Those universities that have rationalised their provision make clear that whilst the number of courses closed might represent a high proportion of the provision they service only a very small minority of the students. Our analysis did indeed show that there is a very long tail of courses recruiting relatively few students.

In commercial sectors the term applied to an optimised portfolio of products is “total unduplicated reach” – i.e. the smallest set of products (courses) that appeal to the widest possible number of prospects in a market.

To achieve equitable decisions on which courses to close, or invest in, clear transparent criteria are required. This can lead to better decisions that are more easily communicated and it can create a level of transparency that builds trust between managers, be they professional support staff or academics.

MANAGING STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

Managing stakeholder perceptions including staff, students, alumni, professional bodies and the media is an important part of the course rationalisation process. It ought to be possible to anticipate generic issues and plan for these. There have been a number of high profile cases that could form the basis for sector development.

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN CASE STUDY

The University of Lincoln significantly pruned its undergraduate portfolio and immediately saw applications and conversion improve for its business school; a pattern that was sustained the following year.

UNIVERSITY OF WALES, NEWPORT CASE STUDY

The University of Wales, Newport undertakes a regular review of the modules offered across the portfolio recognising that this is where the costs of delivery primarily reside. A range of metrics are used.

11 Improving Success in New Programme Development

The failure rate of new courses across the sector is higher than it needs to be but we are confident that it can be improved dramatically by the application of a more robust and staged process.

HEIs can ultimately reduce costs and risk by investing more in the market appraisal of initial concept proposals, evaluating them in a gathered field and by taking a more strategic, market-informed approach to the management of the programme portfolio.

Ultimately the issue is not that the sector does not devise and approve enough highly successful new programmes but that there is a failure to stop many weak proposals at an early stage where robust market evaluation would have indicated success was very unlikely. Letting a thousand flowers bloom has not proved to be an efficient strategy; often resulting in course proliferation, and ultimately more painful rationalisation.

The subjects that the analysis showed to have the greatest incidence of successful new programmes were those that also had the higher proportion of successful established courses and were subjects that were growing in demand.

Where a new programme is entering an established market; data about the appeal of existing courses elsewhere has a valuable predictive quality. Too many Type A courses are approved that have failed to recruit elsewhere.

Success is characterised by the presence of a combination of factors that together produce a winning formula. Internal factors (culture, reputation, commitment, fit, etc) need to align with external conditions (market scale, growth and low competitive intensity) for success to be achieved. For Type B courses a well-defined target market is essential; Rarely do HEIs have the influence to create markets.

Many HEIs do not have an investment approach to new product development and this may inhibit success and also innovation. Some form of academic development fund may be a solution, with transparent criteria aligned with strategic goals. Portfolio management is a hot topic. There is a recognised need to be more proactive in managing the portfolio but this is contentious; executive intervention can create tension challenging the notion of academic freedom.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The project identified the following 10 key factors in the development of successful new courses

1. Researching the choice of a programme title.
2. Operating a staged development process, using early financial and market scrutiny.
3. Being prepared not to develop a proposal into a full programme.
4. Aligning the timetable for new course development with the recruitment cycle.
5. Adapting the approach to marketing according to whether the new course is type A or type B.
6. Recognising the importance of having an academic champion.
7. New programme development being a collaborative process.
8. Encouraging cross-boundary working.
9. Using clear transparent criteria to underpin decisions.
10. Managing stakeholder perceptions.

The full 30 recommendations contained in the report are set out again in the report's final section.

12 Key Recommendations

No Recommendation

- 1 Universities should devise their own models for costing the development of new programmes, creating financial models appropriate to their individual contexts and processes. (Section 2)
- 2 Universities should research and test the choice of a programme title so that it succinctly communicates the programme content and is likely to be understood by the target audience. (Section 4)
- 3 Universities should confirm that there is a well-defined market for a new programme at the concept stage. (Section 4)
- 4 Universities should adopt a Project Management approach to new programme development with a staged process, using early financial and market scrutiny. (Section 4)
- 5 The staged approach to new programme development should include a clear understanding of the information requirements for each stage and define who has the decision-making authority at each point (faculty/school, central committee or executive). (Section 4)
- 6 Universities should make use of Market Intelligence early in the new programme development process, making early judgments about whether proposed new programmes are supported by the available external intelligence and being prepared to exercise the option not to develop the proposal into a full programme. (Section 4)
- 7 Universities should take note that “instant success” is highly predictive of sustained success and keep the success of new courses under review in the early years of delivery. (Section 5)
- 8 Universities should take note that UK recruitment to new postgraduate courses tends to be from the local and contiguous regions. (Section 5)
- 9 Both HESA and UCAS should make small changes to their data collection, storage and retrieval operations which could support the sector to monitor and thus improve programme success rates. (Section 5)
- 10 The timetable for new course development should be aligned with the recruitment cycle, so the timing of entry into the market becomes optimal. (Section 6)

12 Key Recommendations

No Recommendation

- 11 Senior leaders should recognise that planning is important and make sure courses are not launched at the wrong time. (Section 6)
- 12 There should be rigorous scrutiny of proposals early in their development and senior leaders should be prepared where appropriate to stop proposals progressing into development as full new programmes or to hold them until an appropriate time for launch. (Section 6)
- 13 Consideration should be given to each new course having an associated launch promotional plan. (Section 6)
- 14 Course launch promotion discussions should ideally take place before the course is formally approved enhancing the chances of a successful first cycle of recruitment. (Section 6)
- 15 The approach to marketing should be adapted according to whether the new course is type A or type B. (Section 6)
- 16 Whilst using a more evidence-based approach to inform judgments, Universities should exercise caution to ensure that data is not used to make mechanistic decisions, as this may reflect a risk-averse culture and thus stifle innovation. (Section 7)
- 17 Collaboration should be facilitated between academics and the staff likely to be located in a central finance unit when building or assessing the financial projections for a new course. (Section 7)
- 18 Universities might find it useful to consider the past record of the host department in launching programmes when evaluating the risks associated with approving a new programme and investing in its development. (Section 7)
- 19 Data about the performance of similar courses should be used when assessing the probable success of Type A courses. (Section 7)
- 20 Primary research methods should be used to establish a wide basis of information and market intelligence for assessing proposals for Type B courses. (Section 7)

12 Key Recommendations

No Recommendation

- 21 Recognise the importance of having an academic champion for a new programme development as a critical success factor. (Section 8)
- 22 Clarity who in the institution has the lead responsibility for stimulating new course ideas. (Section 8)
- 23 Individual new programmes could be usefully considered within a gathered field of concepts, so as to locate the best prospects for investment. (Section 8)
- 24 Don't rely exclusively on the paperwork to make decisions about whether or not to grant approval to proceed from proposal to full programme development. Consider meeting with the academic champion. (Section 8)
- 25 New programme development should be a collaborative process, recognising and enabling the contributions of a variety of staff including academics and staff from estates, marketing, international, recruitment, finance and quality. (Section 9)
- 26 Universities should pay greater attention to the leadership challenges of enabling staff to work together across professional boundaries. (Section 9)
- 27 HEIs should consider how best to promote, support, reward and encourage cross-boundary working both between academic subjects (in order to support innovative inter-disciplinary programmes) and also between academics and professional support staff (in the process of new programme development). (Section 9)
- 28 Establish clear transparent criteria to underpin decisions on which courses to close, or invest in. Use the criteria to help in the communication of decisions. (Section 10)
- 29 Plan how to manage stakeholder perceptions (including staff, students, alumni, professional bodies and the media) as an important part of the course rationalisation process. (Section 10)
- 30 Consider taking an investment approach to new course development e.g. through the use of an academic development fund. (Section 10)

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