OULDI-JISC Project

Narrative 18

Catherine McNulty is a faculty based Curriculum Manager whose role involves her in three main tasks: she provides project management and administrative support to module teams at all stages of module development and delivery; she is required to contribute to module creation and maintenance as a member of the module team; and finally she acts as the primary information and communication interface between the module team and other areas of the faculty, university, students and other external bodies. Catherine has been a Curriculum manager for six years and has experience of working on a range of modules. Usually Curriculum Managers are allocated to modules after the Business Appraisal has been approved, and will begin by giving administrative support the Module Team Chair in completing the module specification documentation (called the REP03). However, for this module remake (a 'remake' is where an old module is being refreshed and updated rather than designed from scratch) the entire module team was convened soon after the Opportunity Review so that all members of the team, including Catherine, could be engaged in three learning design workshops prior to the early approval documents being submitted. These workshops provided opportunities for the team to review the original module, and engage in design activities, dialogue and thinking about its redevelopment.

Overall, Catherine found that the workshops impacted very positively on her role in the design process:

> "From a Curriculum Managers point of view, it's definitely been positive. It's definitely helped me with getting involved with the whole module [...] I don't think there has been more work for me to do apart from those early workshops which is not much to be involved in, just half a day each and I've definitely benefited from it "

Catherine had taken over management of the module just prior to it coming up for remake and had not yet seen it through a complete delivery and evaluation cycle. As a consequence she did not feel that she knew the module well in terms of both what it contained and how students felt about it. She felt that involvement in the learning design workshops, and particularly the first workshop which focused on reviewing the original module, enabled her and other members of the team to develop a much more comprehensive understanding of the module and how it might be developed:

> "This approach is particularly helpful to people involved who don't know the original module. When you are working on a remake, not everyone is going to know it and even the Chair of this one isn't the Chair of the presentation. I just think the whole thing has been really positive"

She feels that she is now better placed to perform her role than she would be usually because she has been able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how it is intended the module will be changed and developed:

> "It is so much better for a Curriculum Manager to know the module that they are dealing with rather than coming into it once all of those planning stages have passed through. So for me it's a really good opportunity to know a lot more than I would have had I been involved in a normal process of production. I would have come into it for the REP03 so the Business Appraisal would have been a completely new document to me. I would have had to take all that in and put it into the REP03 with the Chair as well. I feel I know a lot more about the module and what [the module team] are planning and about the presentation proposal as well"

Catherine feels that one of the problems with the existing module design process is that key decisions have to be made before the Chair has the opportunity to properly consult the module team or support units. This means that some decisions have to be reversed later in the design process:

> "The problem I've seen before is that when more people become involved later on - particularly after REP03 – then other issues arise and they need to go back and change things"

Additionally her experience has been that module teams can struggle to make sense of the module when they come to the process later and this can impact on the team's ability to make timely decisions:

> "I've seen a lot of Module Teams [...] after the REP03 struggling to pull things together [...] I've been involved so often after the REP03 and when they're doing the [materials] specification where teams have been saying "we don't know yet, we can't tell you this, we can't tell you that". And there's always that worry that they've gone ahead and ...you don't want to push them into decisions just because you have to [...] that's when I start to get a bit worried, that three meetings down the road we still don't have a decision but that has never happened with this module team."

This in turn can impact on other roles in the design and production process, and can lead to significant inefficiencies across units:

> "At the [materials] specification stage as well, where there is lots of uncertainly and the [media project manager (MPM)] is also struggling to try and get the team to think about things. [...] One of the things the MPMs often struggle with

is so many versions going back and forth. They always struggle to get the team to pinpoint exactly what it is that they need"

Catherine feels strongly that - at least in this case - using a learning design approach has made the process of redesign more efficient than it usually might be. She believes that the module team has been able to work in a more confident and focused way, and that as a consequence meetings are shorter and working relationships are more effective:

"I've noticed with the involvement of the library [...] and the other non-academic members of the team that they've really jelled together and the academics are listening to what the non-academics are saying. I'm not saying that they don't usually but sometimes you find in the early stages that academics will be focusing on their part of it [...] when we held that planning meeting we just flew through it because we had covered lots of those areas so early on"

"I think all the academics have really pulled together, they've all been very involved and all the meetings have gone very, very smoothly. I think our module team meetings are shorter than they would be had we not thrashed out these things so early"

"I know in the last meeting [someone] mentioned a concern about the amount of [audio-visual material (AV)] we were having - and I was just so confident that I knew the team was so focused on it. I knew they had already thought about it and straight away [the module team chair] was able to say "that is the nature of the module". Whereas there could be other times when – and I don't know if it is to do with that early design – but there have been other situations where you mention to somebody "there's a lot of AV here" and there's a bit of a wobble in the team, but they're so confident in what they are doing and what they are planning"

Catherine felt that the Module Map and the associated CBM-developed tool, the Module Design Planner had had most impact from her point of view:

"I think that having that map of what the existing module has already and then working on what this team wants to include week by week, it's really, really helpful I think - it helps you conceptualise everything [...] and with the [...] Module Design Planner I think they are really having to think about what the students is having to focus on, and looking at the workload and of course I have

had to drum that in a little bit but not as much. I don't know whether it's the module team but I [barely] had to mention the student workload planner. They just seem to have such a good idea of what the student is going to do each week"

But that the combination of tools and activities used had worked well to ensure that the design thinking required so that the Business Appraisal and module specification documents could be completed in an informed and coherent way, had been done:

"We haven't had out REP03 approved yet but the Business Appraisal (BA) that went in was very, very thorough [...]All the planning documents and the design documents that [the OULDI project officer] had worked with [the module team chair] to provide meant that the REP03 was more or less done by that stage [...] it was more or less there when it came to doing it. I've been involved in other modules where for each area you are going back and starting afresh because the BA doesn't always feed into the fields of the REP03 but all the information that we had that didn't get used in the BA was for the REP03 so in that sense it cut down on the time we needed to process the REP03 [...]I feel that if we hadn't covered it as we have, there would be lots of areas where ...I think that it was pretty much there"

Finally, when asked what advice she would give other Curriculum managers about using the learning design approach used for this remake Catherine focused on the importance of Curriculum Managers familiarising themselves with the process, getting involved in the process early and ensuring the commitment of the whole team, which she recognises is not always easy for logistical reasons:

"There is something about time and making sure you are available for the workshops at the beginning [...], getting round the materials that you provide and looking at them and knowing about the process before they get started and how it's different from the procedures that we've used before"

"I'd find it hard to understand why anybody wouldn't want to go with it because it's not much more in terms of time. I can just see at this stage how its cut down on so many other things but you do need that early commitment from all the other members of the team though, and I think[in our case] as we've got so many academic members on site, its been easy to arrange those meetings so that everybody could attend"