

OULDI project

Narrative 11

Dylan and Hannah are senior lecturers in the Urban, Environmental and Leisure Studies department. They run the Tourism programme which had recently been revalidated.

One of the changes in the validation was that the year-long work placement was abandoned; this situation arose because students were applying for exemptions so often that it seemed easier to move away from the practice. The validation panel felt that this was a great pity and challenged the team to use the opportunities of the CMP to reintroduce a work placement, possibly in a different shape. The project team was asked to work with the course team to this end.

The major challenge of this design was to create a course structure that fitted around a new, shorter (3 month) credit bearing work placement between the first and second years of study. Ideally the placement should draw on learning from first year modules and feed into new modules early in the second year. One of the tools that the project team had developed for use with another department was a representation, using coloured card, of the different “shapes” (long, thin; normal; short, fat; etc.) that modules might take. A credit value (10, 20, 40 or 60) was colour-coded for ease of recognition and available in the range of possible shapes. The course team used that to plan the new design, working independently, but referring back to the project team.

After two iterations, the team has come up with a workable shape for the curriculum that satisfied all their requirements. At that point a directive from on high knocked the plans awry: all courses in the faculty *had* to comprise of 6 × 20 credit modules per year – 3 per semester – with the only variation allowed being the Level 6 dissertation. That could be 40 units. This was in direct conflict with the earlier, institutional, approach and many course teams saw weeks and months of hard work slashed with the stroke of a pen, so to speak. Dylan and Hannah were not the only people to feel angry and misunderstood by the university. At this stage, it became the role of the project team to see what could be salvaged and refashioned according to the new edict. That this was achieved was in no small part due to the determination of the course team to see their students engage in a worthwhile programme.

There is no doubt that allowing this course team to consider a variety of ways in which their programme might fit together, using a visualisation of the shape of the learning design sparked new ways of thinking about the possibilities. The iterations that they went through before the final design show the effect of literally seeing the pieces of the curriculum design fitting together in different ways. Thus far, the new curriculum has not yet been implemented, so evidence of an improvement in learning and teaching is hard to quantify. This course team clearly worked very well together before they sought help from the project

team. What the visualisation technique clearly did was to provide them with a “shorthand” way to communicate ideas about the shape that the curriculum might be.

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that the change in faculty direction on the flexibility of modules changes the value of representing ideas in a concrete way. The choice of the faculty is in no way linked to the tool. It is clear to me that the early work on the shape of the curriculum created a space in the turmoil to negotiate a new path; that is a very useful outcome. Nonetheless, in the circumstances it would be very difficult to make any causal links between the new curriculum and the use of the tool.