David Spendlove – Good Practice in Teaching Podcast, recorded May 2022

Transcript

Becki Bennett: Welcome to this Good Practice in Teaching Podcast. I'm Professor Becki Bennett, and in this podcast I'm speaking to Professor David Spendlove, who's going to explain what the university's Size and Shape project means for the Faculty of Humanities.

So, welcome David, we've got you here today to find out a bit more about the Size and Shape project that's going on in Humanities. I wondered, if you just give us a kind of just basic overview of what Size and Shape is what it means. And just explain a little bit more for us.

David Spendlove: Okay. So, the Size and Shape is a university initiative. It's not just a faculty initiative. Although many people will think it's entirely a faculty initiative, and it's about increasing the size, of the Faculty of Humanities. As part of this, the Faculty of Humanities will grow. Which effectively will increase the income coming into the faculty, but also to the university. Now, this is needed to effectively balance the entire ecosystem of the university, the financial ecosystem, as we know all universities have financial challenges and particularly over the coming years.

So, one of the features of this was that the Size and Shape Task Force, was established to identify a way forward and as a consequence, the strategy is to grow the portfolio for the Faculty of Humanities. So, what we will see over the next few years is a growth in our portfolio of provision. Particularly in certain areas because that's the, the challenge of this, it's trying to manage both the size and the shape of the faculty.

BB: it's great. So, it's mainly around looking at how we can create new courses to generate new income. And I guess to also reach students that we're not reaching at the moment.

DS: Yes, so primarily it is about increasing the size of the faculty. So, at the moment the Faculty of Humanities is approximately 44 percent of the student body. This is smaller than the Russell Group average. So, we will see the faculty grow to be bigger than half of the university, over the coming years. As part of that there then is the, how do we do it and the development of the infrastructure to change the size and shape. So, there are three elements to that. I mean, there are multiple elements, but there are three main elements that probably colleagues will be familiar with or come across. One of them is shaping the portfolio. Two is just building better 'products'. And we're using the term products deliberately, because actually, as part of this, we've used that approach of development products and marketing, again, appreciate that many people might not like the term, but its product development that were looking at. And then the third element is looking at the portfolio that exists and how we kind of continually monitor it, review it and refresh it. Now. The other side of that is taking a much more strategic approach to the portfolio.

Many of these things have existed previously but what we are very much doing is developing this in a much more strategic way and a much more systematic way, largely because a faculty, the size that we are, which is bigger than most universities should have quite a strategic and a systematic approach to developing our portfolio. It protects all of us if the portfolio is healthy and is able to

constantly renew itself. So, the aspects that we are developing is, one improved marketing and that is throughout the stage of the development of new programmes, but also in the identifying new markets and where we should be working. The second is committing to timelines, because often for those people who have often been involved in programme development, we've never really been precise about when a new programme would start and how it would develop. So, we are committing to timelines, and we are framing this around what we've called a 'shepherding process' simply because we're identifying a number of milestones. So, when a new programme is identified, we identify 19 milestones, I think it is at the moment, and we then have a timeline for those programmes, and then we monitor against those timelines, over the duration. Simply because, there is a high-cost financial cost and organizational cost if we are not meeting those deadlines, but the other side of all of this is the quality side. So, what we're trying to do is build-in a much higher-quality process from the outset as well. So, we're also using a 'learning design process' throughout the development of the new programmes.

So, together the marketing, the shepherding and the learning design come together in a kind of symbiotic relationship, to ultimately, develop high-quality programmes that are going to be future proof and that are going to be very attractive to home students and international students, that draw upon our research and that fit into areas that we are wanting to grow and are part of a managed process.

There are other elements to it as well. So, there's a commitment to the resourcing of these new programmes from the outset. So once a new programme is identified we are already working on the resource requirements for that programme in two years' time. So, lots of things are coming together to try to build a high-quality system that makes this a much more, I was going to say 'attractive' but I doubt it will be attractive but a much more 'managed process' for colleagues to go through because often colleagues find developing new products quite challenging and quite difficult. What we are also trying to do is make that a much more managed process where we are working with people to support them. And so, it's supportive in nature from the outset, to guide them through these steps because it is quite bewildering when you're developing a new programme. So, from the very first stage, which we have as a pre-stakeholder process, once the programme is identified from the pre-stakeholder process to the stakeholder to NPP1 and NPP2, working with learning design, working with marketing and going through the shepherding process. We would hope and our early feedback is that people find this a much more 'enjoyable' process.

BB: Thanks. I know. It can be a really onerous thing putting forward a new programme. And that kind of support that, you know, becomes a kind of a team process rather than just on one individual shoulders sounds really great. What if somebody's really interested at the moment in putting forward a new programme, does the fact that size and shapes are already rolling and perhaps, there's already plans for at least the next couple of years mean that they can't bring forward new ideas for new programmes at the moment.

DS: Yes. I mean, we're very interested in new ideas. I think the big difference is this is a strategic approach which we've never had before. Now, programmes have been proposed in the past and not developed. So, I think one of the things is that some people might feel they've just put a proposal forward and that's not been taken up and that's because of size and shape. It may well be, but that has always happened. We are very much interested and I'm very happy for people to contact me to

talk about the new programme proposals at any stage and what we've got is actually a managed process for that.

But as part of the managed process for, and a strategic approach to, developing the portfolio, we've had to prioritize certain developments because again, it's in everyone's interest that we develop a strong portfolio, and we build upon those areas that are showing potential for growth. So, at the moment we have identified around about 25 programmes, which are being developed over a three-year period and that's probably many more than we've ever done before. So again, we are, we've been proactive in identifying those programmes.

And the way that we've agreed them is, it's gone through the faculty leadership teams. So, Heads of School, first of all, have prioritized programmes, then faculty leadership teams have prioritized them. We have a size and shape board that then sign off the programme. So, we're just in the process of waiting for the sign off for the 2024 programmes, which we will then be working on across the next two years so you can see it's a much more strategic approach to developing the portfolio.

What it does mean is that because we are managing the size and the shape that sometimes programmes might not fit into that. But equally, we would be able to tell people how they may be able to fit into that planning. And secondly, where they would fit in? Because, again, what we are doing, is taking a strategic approach to when programmes will be developed and how they will develop, and then putting them into a timeline. So, for probably the first time in the faculty's history, we know the next 25 programmes that are coming online. We are already starting to talk about the 2025 programmes. We've got a list, an initial list of 2025 programmes and if people think that they have ideas for 2025, I think the first conversations probably are to have in the departments and in their school. And if the school is committed to them, they will propose them to the faculty team, but equally if someone wants to just have an initial conversation then I'm quite happy to have that conversation.

BB: That's really great David and I think we could talk about this for a long time and there's all sorts of other interesting aspects about curriculum design and how this really puts that at the forefront of developing courses, but I think for now I'd be really good to just finish up by saying we'll put your email address in the blurb that goes alongside this podcast. And if people have got other questions about size and shape, they can contact you. Is that okay?

DS: That's absolutely fine. Because one of the things we want to do, I mean, we've gone through a process of trying to inform people about what size and shape is and what it isn't. Because inevitably there's a kind of mystique about these things. We went through a process, I say we, I went through a process of meeting with all Heads of Department and presenting to all Heads of Departments at the start of the cycle. And also, with Directors of Teaching and Learning, along with all those people who attend the core briefing.

Again, I'm happy to explain what it is and what it isn't and so that we can address any of the kind of misconceptions that might arise around it. So yes, please do contact me and we'll have a conversation.

BB: That's really great David. Thanks so much for coming along today and for talking to us. Thank you very much.

DS: Thank you.