

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

Transcript

Hannah Cobb (HC): Welcome to the first podcast of the Academic Year 2022 2023 and my name is Hannah Cobb. I am the Interim Associate Dean for Online and Blended Learning so I'm keeping the seat warm and I'm taking over from Becki Bennett who did lots of these fantastic podcasts last year and in the previous few years. And then in the last but one podcast that Becki did, which came out in June, she spoke to David Spendlove, who is the Faculty of Humanities Associate Dean for Teaching Portfolio, to find out a little bit more about the Size and Shape Project. And since June things have moved on, the Size and Shape Project has developed more. And so, I'm really excited to welcome David again to have a chat about that.

So David, thank you very much for coming to talk about Size and Shape. For those who listened to that back in June and need their memories refreshing, could you remind us a little bit about what Size and Shape is?

David Spendlove (DS): Yeah. Size and Shape is multifaceted. And one of the priorities that and the headline that most people will be familiar with is that it's basically how we're going to manage our portfolio going forward, to hit some key objectives, but primarily to grow our portfolio in the way that we want to.

However, it's much more than that. And I think one of the things that's probably useful today to explore is, is just some of the different ways that it might be conceived and how people may interact with the portfolio.

But the main dimension is that the portfolio is going to grow, but it's going to be growing in a managed way and quite a different approach to how we develop our portfolio.

HC: Brilliant. So, tell us a little bit more then about the process of development about the themes of the Size and Shape process.

DS: Okay, so I think there are, what we've kind of decided, is that there are five main themes around Size and Shape. Now, we didn't know this before we started, this is what has emerged over the last 18 months or so.

So first of all, the first part is what I've just mentioned is that the growing of the portfolio - this is around about 25 programmes that were developing over a three year period, it may increase that but there's a solid foundation of 25 new programmes, of which there are 10 new programmes going to be starting next September. So people involved in those, they'll know what's happening and they'll be very much part of that development.

Now, the second element of Size and Shape that became apparent very quickly was that we needed an infrastructure. So we need to build an infrastructure to create these programmes because we've never developed so many programmes at the same time, in the same way, to very tight, kind of key performance indicators about what we were going to do. So that included developing what we've

called previously a shepherding process, which guides people through 19 steps. And I'll talk about that in a little more detail later. Secondly, a learning design process and then thirdly the linking of Marketing and Admissions and Finance all together so that everyone is basically on the same page. So that's the building part.

The next side of Size of Shape is the policy side. So making sure that our policies align with the portfolio developments and the main one that colleagues will be familiar with is something called QSDE which is Quality Design and Enhancement. So this is what we've previously had as our approvals committee but we're now framing that very much around the key themes of quality, design and enhancement, basically to ensure that all programmes, not just Size and Shape, but all developments go through that process.

The fourth element. And this is very much in its early stages, but the fourth element of Size and Shape is a review and refresh approach. So looking at our existing portfolio, checking on its well-being, making sure that it's fit for purpose and doing those things that we need it to do. I've said many many times that our portfolio is our biggest asset. So we need to know how we are monitoring that and also how we are making sure it's fit for purpose going forward. So that's things like looking at the data associated with our portfolio, looking at the cost, looking at the number of units and so on.

And then finally, the fifth element is also in its early stages but is likely to become much more significant. Initially we've called it simplifying the curriculum but it's also linking to something called transforming of the curriculum and basically, this is about just how many programmes do we have, and how are the various parts of those components fitting together and working. So, basically the number of units that we have is huge, and do we know what they're all doing, are they all working properly? Do we have repetition of our units and how are we avoiding duplication?

So they're the five elements that once people can get their head around that, and they don't have to get the head around that because that's for me to do. But once you get your head around that you can see how all of those parts of Size and Shape fit together.

HC: That's amazing. This is a really nerdy question. So how many programmes do we have across the whole of the Faculty of Humanities? Do you know?

DS: It depends how you count, but there is a lot. So it's between 400 and 600, again, depending upon how you count. But if you then go into kind of unique pathways, then we get into really large numbers. And what we've got to do is make sure that we know that each one of those programmes is doing what it's meant to do. And also, when you then say, how many units are associated with each programme, you get into the thousands then, and then one of the things that we're looking at the moment is just the number of units with very, very, very small numbers on. Now often that could be easily explained but knowing how each of those units contributes to a programme is just really, really important.

Inevitably. I think you know whenever people hear that we're looking at this or try to find out that, there can be some concern, but this is in all of our best interest that we understand how the component parts all make the contribution to the portfolio that actually sustains much of what we do on a daily basis and ultimately results in a high-quality student experience.

HC: it's really interesting to hear about the process. For me, it sounds sort of like, lifting up the bonnet of the Faculty of Humanities and making sure that all of the components are running smoothly underneath.

And, you know, the idea that there is so many different programmes and how we sort of manage all of those is really interesting to hear about the process. From my perspective with a love of e-learning, it's really exciting to hear about the kind of infrastructure that's being created, that kind of joined-up approach I think sounds like such a sort of important way to develop this process and the fact that you're sort of embedding Learning Design within it is really brilliant, and is it all right to ask you just a little bit more about that?

DS: That's yes, certainly. Yeah. I mean, so, you know, one of the things is all of this was conceived during the height of Covid, you know. So we had a task force that was meeting throughout Covid. And these were dark times when we were meeting at the end of the day, people from across the faculty, to look at this new priority, which was Size and Shape.

And it was it was at that point that we kind of started to see how learning design, which we knew existed, but how we could build that into the process. And to me, it's one of the biggest features of our curriculum and portfolio going forward because I think just the early evidence that we've had is so promising, and so positive, from when we've built it into the new programmes that, you know, we'd be foolish to not build upon or not to find out the ways in which it's working and what it does.

The premise is, is that, you know, my background is teacher education. I've been planning learning sequences for a long long, long time, and it's very hard to do. I mean, at one level anyone could do it, but equally to do it well isn't that straightforward.

And you know what we've done throughout the processes so far with the new programmes is matched up the academics with learning design teams to kind of focus on key areas and take them through that process. Now, at the same time we've also got Marketing taking them through a process and at the same time we've got Shepherding taking them through a process, a process of 19 steps. So you can see there's a lot for the academic to normally hold them there. I mean, in many respects, it's almost impossible for an academic to do it to the standard that we wanted to be done without the levels of support that we're providing. And the feedback as I say, is incredibly positive. But one of the things that we're looking at this year again, is trying to formalize our thinking around learning design and very much building in priorities.

So the priorities that we're now focusing on are student voice which I think many, many people struggle to conceptualize and if you get it wrong then, you know, you can't really build upon it. Secondly, really putting an emphasis on mapped assessment and thinking about how we assess. And again, anyone can do assessment but actually to do it well is really quite difficult. So matching people to colleagues is really, really important. Inclusion again, is a priority. So we've actually built that into our 2024 programmes as a priority. It should always be there anyway but again I think colleagues struggle, so we now build in EDI involvement in our development steps. And also we have something called quarterly reviews and one of those will focus specifically on EDI and supporting colleagues. Another one which you'll be familiar with is digital skills and looking to how we build that in. So, we're dedicating time to that specifically. Employability again, which obviously links to digital skills but looking much wider than that.

And you know, all these people that I'm talking about and all those themes, they're at the very start of the process so that they meet at the stakeholder meeting. And then we map out when they're going to be involved in the development of the programme. And then finally, which kind of tops and tails the whole process, is ensuring that the programmes have a clear identity. But also there's a coherence and a progression and that's really, really important. And what that is all done through is a clear process of what we've mapped out as 19 steps, okay.

So the 19 steps are what academics will go through from start to finish. Now we'd never mapped this out previously. In many respects it's probably several hundred steps but there are 19 milestones that we map out for each programme and we put a date against each one. And then on a monthly basis we evaluate where each programme is against that milestone. And in some respects, you know, some people have said, why does it take two years to build a programme? and it doesn't, we can do it very quickly. It takes over a year though to market the programme. You know if you're if you're talking about getting a programme out to people who've never known it even existed, you need a year to market it. The time it takes to actually build a programme can vary. We could do it very quickly but inevitably we don't want quality to suffer and all those things that I've just talked about, you know, they are, they take time to do, but we support people and we're getting quicker at doing it. So, I know kind of sometimes, as I say, people can say that it's just seems to be taking a long time. Actually, it's quite a short time that we take and as I say mapping through those 19 steps.

And the big difference is now, is when we start, and when we agree a programme, which is agreed by the Size and Shape Board and by The Faculty Leadership Team. We then expect it to come to fruition. Whereas, in the past, we've started programmes, but they haven't always emerged. But what we were also doing is building in the resources from the very start as well. So, at that very first stage, we involved timetabling and we involved conversations about staffing because we know they're going to be needed at various stages. So staff are typically being employed to develop these programmes along the way. So the commitment is there and it's a very different way of doing programme development, but a very productive way as well.

HC: It's really interesting. It's really interesting to hear about how holistic that process is. And yeah, I still think two years sounds quite quick, to be honest in terms of turning it around. I imagine the colleagues who are running the 10 new courses, 10 new programme starting next semester, probably feel like two years is quite quick as well.

Could you, can you give us a bit of a reminder what have we got starting next September then?

DS: So in 2023, we've got some really interesting programmes and well, they're all interesting but some really quite new ventures and each of them, we've started almost with a blank slate but, you know, trying to think about them in different ways, but we've got, I'll just give you a sample from each of the school. So we've got a new BA Global Development from SEED which is the first of the graduate programme from GDI. So they're venturing into undergraduate for the first time and I think that's just really interesting. We've got a new MSC Urban Studies which is a really good example of where we take a programme from a research area that didn't previously have teaching in place and we've developed a new master's programme for Urban Studies. And, you know, the colleagues on that have been really positive about their experiences. They've said we should do this for everything. I mean, if only we had the time, but they've done some really great work because they've been

starting from scratch some really interesting assessment work that they're doing, and perhaps we can talk about that at another date.

SALC have got some fantastic programmes to do with digital media and cultural and society. Also, one really interesting one is MA Library and Archive Studies, which is going to be based at the John Rylands and again is just a fantastic programme, just really interesting the way it's been developed. We've got Digital Marketing for AMBS. SOSS, we've got another Global Social Challenges. One of the things that's interesting is the social dimension and more so, in the 2024 programmes is the sustainability and environment programmes. So 2024, we've got another 10 programmes. We've got some programmes that have distance learning as part of this as well. And together, you know, they are looking really very interesting. One of the things that we are looking for is perhaps a few programmes that are bit different as well. While they are different, I think it would be interesting to see what might be possible as well. But we're, you know, we're looking at new programmes all the time.

HC: Amazing, it's really interesting to hear about all of this and for me, like you can hear like, you know, the the amazing strengths of teaching and learning across the faculty and research across the faculty, sort of coalescing in these courses and bringing in all of our sort of, you know, collaboration with our culture, with our cultural institutions. And, you know, it's just, it's just so brilliant to hear about all of these.

Thank you so much for coming to talk to us about this, David. And then I think, certainly in a year's time, we're probably going to have to have a catch up again to sort of see how the first ones have got going, how it's all worked out. For colleagues who are listening to this who are interested in learning design and even if you're not running a Size and Shape programme, you can engage with the faculty's Learning Design services via our website and we'll put the link in the description but yeah, thank you so much once again, David. It's been really brilliant to hear about it and we'll look forward to talking more in the future. Thank you.

DS: Thank you.