

**Title:** **Transcending module silos: growing and supporting curriculum change agents**

**Presenter:** **Nina Brooke, Karen Ayres and Andrew Charlton-Perez**  
University of Reading

### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Knowledge Based Learning Outcomes:

- Explore the challenges of facilitating an institution-wide culture of collaboration in curriculum review that transcends module silos
- Recognise the importance of leadership in meaningful curriculum change, and the need to support and develop Programme Directors as curriculum change agents within Schools
- Discuss practical steps to engage and empower Programme Directors to take more strategic ownership of their programmes and foster a programme team ethos

### **Session Outline**

Curriculum change is essential in a rapidly changing Higher Education landscape, but presents many challenges (Pegg, 2014). Academic freedom and the flexibility afforded by modularisation can lead to fragmentation of programmes with academics operating in module silos, and students compartmentalising their learning. However, a transformative student experience which aims to progressively develop graduate attributes requires coherence and collaboration.

At the University of Reading we have embarked upon an ambitious curriculum change programme, with all Schools reviewing their undergraduate programmes over a three year period. Our recently launched Curriculum Framework provides a shared articulation of the criteria by which the design of new and review of existing programmes should be undertaken. To mitigate academics operating in module silos, the Framework is purposely focused at the programme (rather than the module) level.

Successful implementation of the Framework requires the support of strong leadership teams, with Programme Directors at their heart. A leadership team "is a small group of people who are collectively responsible for achieving a common objective for their organisation", who should create, communicate and reinforce clarity around change (Lencioni, 2012). Leadership is key to building a programme team ethos, but needs scaffolding and support, particularly

because many Programme Directors may lack leadership experience, and leadership of excellence in teaching involves many activities (Gibbs, Knapper & Piccinin, 2008).

This session will outline the steps we have taken thus far to engage and empower Programme Directors to strategically lead curriculum review. These include:

- Seconding academics to the educational development team to pilot the Framework in a range of Schools and co-create online guidance documents for staff leading curriculum review;
- Developing leadership potential in Programme Directors through staff development sessions co-created by an academic and educational developer;
- Creating a Community of Practice for Programme Directors to foster an institution-wide culture of collaboration.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

5 mins - outline the context and reinforce the need for a partnership approach to developing and supporting Programme Directors as curriculum change agents

15 mins – facilitated discussion (3 sub-groups, each of which discusses and captures their ideas on a flip chart on one of the 3 questions below for 5-7 mins followed by poster tour for 5-7 minutes).

1. How can we facilitate an institution-wide culture of collaboration that transcends module silos?
2. What challenges does ‘academic freedom’ pose to the design and delivery of cohesive programmes, and how can we overcome these?
3. How can academics and educational developers work together to develop and support Programme Directors as curriculum change agents?

10 mins – outline the practical steps we have taken thus far to engage and empower Programme Directors in leadership development and fostering a programme team- approach to curriculum review

5-7 mins – facilitated discussion (whole group)

Programme directors come and go - how do we ensure sustainability of a change agent ethos?

How do we measure cultural change?

5-7 mins – plenary discussion to summarise key points to emerge from the discussions

## References

Gibbs G., Knapper C., Piccinin S. (2008) Disciplinary and Contextually Appropriate Approaches to Leadership of Teaching in Research-Intensive Academic Departments in Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, **62**: 416–436.

Lencioni, P. (2012). *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pegg, A. (2014). "We think that's the future": curriculum reform initiatives in higher education. York: The Higher Education Academy. Available at: [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Research/curriculum\\_reform\\_initiatives](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Research/curriculum_reform_initiatives) [accessed 20th May 2017]