

Faculties as curriculum contractors.

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In this model the departments are primarily concerned as research centres and providers of course teaching. The faculties define and manage the curriculum according to the University's quality policy and learning and teaching strategy. Departments would then be contracted and paid by the Faculty to deliver specific courses, lab classes, tutorials and other necessary teaching activities. The payment for these contracts would be performance related. The Faculty would monitor the teaching quality through student evaluation, external examiner and assessors' reports etc. If there were continual problems with a particular department or lecturer's teaching performance then this would affect the price paid for the contract or some other solution would be found. Excellent performances could be rewarded financially.

Staff in departments who were not research active could be transferred to the Faculty and become Faculty (teaching) fellows. They would be expected to undertake significant amounts of curriculum administration as well as teaching and other learning support activities. Thus these academic staff would not be returned under the RAE so ensuring that all departments could be returned as category A research centres. I am assuming that the fellows will give some of the courses directly funded by the Faculty (but see below). The fellows would also provide much of the QA monitoring by sampling the lectures and tutorials etc. provided by the departments, holding sessions with students, and so on.

If Faculty fellows were active in educational and scholarship publications it might be possible to return them as a separate RAE centres - e.g. engineering education, humanities education, science education, medical education etc. This would need discussion with HEFCE to establish that such returns would be treated fairly and not penalised by being considered as education or as the subject by the panels.

For excellent teachers and curriculum innovators a promotion route to Senior Fellow (equivalent to senior lecturer) would be available and in exceptional cases those with a strong publication record and an international reputation in their field promotion to professorial fellows (with the epithet) and this would provide a career structure for those who are enthusiastic and effective teachers - something we desperately need if we are not to face serious problems in the future.

The Faculty would determine the curriculum and course structure through a process of consultation both with the SMG and PVC(L&T) and the departments, policy committees could set the agenda and the basic principles and the teaching affairs committees would deal with the details. It is important that the University's teaching agenda - covering important issues such as employability, quality, consistency and delivery strategies is addressed in a systematic way rather than in piecemeal department dependant way as at present.

Another outcome might be a wider choice for students. There is some evidence that some departments are restricting the modules that 'their' students can take in other departments to maximise their FTE income and this is leading to departments teaching too many modules, some of which are of a very specialist nature. Students are trapped into attending this material whereas they might prefer to study another subject as well as their main subject. Why does department X restrict student choice in this way but department Y doesn't? Is this defensible from an institutional point of view, shouldn't all students in a faculty have a similar amount of free choice?

Under a contract system the department has to provide high quality courses, if there is extra demand for their courses this will lead to more resources flowing. If the demand is weak then the department will either have to adapt to provide a more relevant portfolio of courses or focus on maximising their research income.

There would have to be a transfer of some resources to faculties, these would be to support the administration of the scheme, to pay the costs of the fellows and to transfer some administrators from departments, parts of LTSU, Student Services etc. The faculties would take over as much of the teaching related administration from the departments as possible including much of the admissions and examinations work. This would release departments from work which is sometimes done well and sometimes less well. The management information would then be available at Faculty level rather than in departments and would be more readily available for planning and monitoring performance issues. An alternative model would be to keep the fellows funded within the departments and pay for them through the teaching contracts. This needs further analysis.

Why would this plan be a good idea? It would provide a more consistent approach to education - there is a lot of variability amongst departments, some would say that this is a strength but only if we know that it is all excellent - how would we know this? Why is it that some departments do one thing whereas some others in a very similar situation do the opposite. It is mainly down to historical and cultural factors and may not stand up to audit scrutiny if we cannot defend it - or worse still if we don't even know about it!

Why would departments buy into this? Coupled with the transfer of non-research active staff (who would still be located physically in the department) it provides them with a solution to a problem that exercises a lot of them, what to do with such colleagues? It also releases departments from significant teaching related administration. I have noticed over the last couple of years that the heads of departments in my Faculty have much less interest in teaching than used to be the case. They have been recruited or promoted entirely because of research excellence and some of them have taken very little interest in teaching issues unto now. This should be a concern since their experience and understanding of the modern teaching agenda may be rather limited.

Of course, departments will object to losing resources and control over the curriculum. The challenge of the faculties is to ensure that the curriculum programme is not only of high quality but also fits into the requirements of departments in matters such as accreditation. Departments would be fully involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum but the University's agenda will predominate.

Examples of curriculum structures such as recently proposed in Engineering could be introduced swiftly and adapting to market pressures and needs would also be better done in this way.

[I believe that Surrey have a mechanism a bit like this for some of their provision.]

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