

Development of work planning systems which support pedagogies which encourage student and staff autonomy



Commenced: 2006

What is it?

The project is an attempt to understand the relationship between systems in practice for the work planning of academic staff and their development. The alternative pedagogic approaches to curriculum delivery, associated with the development of learner autonomy, will often involve the adoption of non-standard contact patterns which are difficult to accommodate within conventional work-planning models.

These non-standard elements may include a reduction in contact time which is substituted by email or blackboard support; intensive early lecturer input followed by occasional tutorials; weekend starter sessions followed by distance learning support; high inputs into blackboard exercises or distance learning materials; student interactions with limited lecturer input etc.

Increased financial pressures on institutions of higher education have made financial assessment of the performance of individual products, or collections of products, more important. There are considerable problems of joint costs, overhead allocation, cost drivers and product definition associated with the financial assessment of educational products. These problems have often been overcome by proxy indicators of efficiency such as student intake numbers, class size, contact time, lecture tutorial ratio, number of modules running, which are mainly associated with economies of scale or scope. Such rules of thumb are often not appropriate with alternative pedagogies.

What is involved?

The initial part of the project is a review of existing work planning practices at Sheffield Hallam University, starting with a review of the practice on the ground of the whole system, and then focussing down on areas of educational delivery which are associated with student autonomy e.g. distance learning courses and blended delivery. Wider evidence will then be sought from other Universities. Evidence will be collected by a mixture of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Links will be made with costing procedures and the TAS auditing of academic staff activity.

Why is the project important to the CETL and the University?

The University is increasingly involved in the development of awards delivered by distance learning or blended delivery. The development of more autonomous learning is also of importance to full-time students. Existing work planning practices concentrate on and give credit to teaching contact rather than learning output and need to adapt as new technologies and educational philosophies displace conventional teaching practice and work planning.

What impact do you hope the project will have?

The impact of the project will be to highlight best practice in work planning for the development of student and staff autonomy. It will question practices which have perverse incentives and influence the evolution of existing work planning practices. It will relate to attempts to cost individual educational products and assess their profitability, and also to the TAS auditing of academic staff activity.

Future Developments

Following on from this work it is hoped that there will be development methods of financial assessment of non-standard delivery methods in the context of the wider strategic business unit, development of methods of financial modelling of non-standard delivery methods, and development methods of appropriate activity analysis of non-standard delivery methods for use in activity based costing models of financial assessment.

Links

A teaching cost function for higher education. *Ealing Working Papers in Economics* No. 8 1990.

A comment on recent estimates of economies of scale in higher education. *Applied Economics Letters* July 1995.

Costs, Revenues and the Definition of Subject Groups and Awards (internal SHU paper circulated within the Faculty of D&S 2005)

Contact details

Paul Cormack

0114 2252919

P.A.Cormack@shu.ac.uk

This information can be made available in other formats.
Please contact us for details.