

# THE AGILE UNIVERSITY

## CASE STUDY

### UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND STRATEGIC CHANGE

*Engaging for Business Process Improvement and  
Organisation Design*



University of the  
West of England



elementa  
leadership

## The Context & Need

1

The University of the West of England (UWE) had developed a new strategic plan taking into account the changed circumstances of UK Higher Education. This plan included the need to achieve cost efficiencies and service improvements. The vision for UWE 'is to be the UK's best knowledge and learning partnership University', and its mission 'is to make a positive difference to its students, business and society.'

In particular, the strategic plan focused on the need for an improved student experience and the development of an organisational structure that would be more responsive in enabling strategic goals and priorities. The Vice-Chancellor had identified four key strategic enablers to deliver strategic partnership themes. These were:

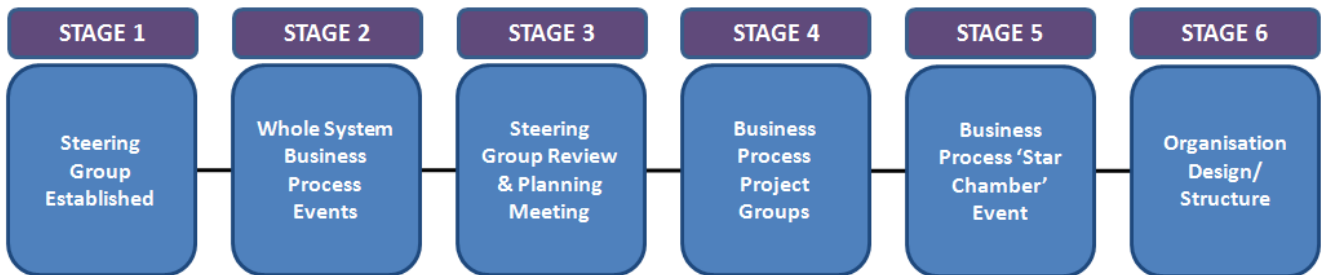
- Income generation and financial sustainability
- Responsive services, integrated processes and organisational coherence
- Management information
- The UWE campus environment

The overall responsibility for leading the necessary improvements was taken by the Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Business Change and Innovation, who did not wish to impose new structures and business processes but wanted to engage with the body of knowledge that existed in the University to develop these. At the same time there was a desire to connect people with the wider need for change and improvement. What was required was an approach that resulted in a better student experience, cost efficiencies and a cultural shift such that people would become more student centric, commercially focused and less 'siloed' in their outlook. Furthermore, there was a need to reduce any 'them' and 'us' tensions that might inhibit effective collaboration between academic and administrative communities to enable the Vice-Chancellor's vision of 'One University'.

# The Solution

The process developed was, by design, iterative and emergent and substantially based on stakeholder engagement. This approach allowed a clearer view of the complexity and interdependencies involved and allowed the learning achieved in one stage to inform the next. It also sent a clear message to all in the University that their voices were respected and valued.

## The Process



### Stage One

#### Steering Group Established

Establishment of a Steering Group comprising Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Business, Change and Innovation, the five Executive Deans of Faculties, Heads of the Professional Services (Marketing, Student Services, Admissions, Business Information & Planning and Academic Registry) and Faculty Administration Managers.

The purpose of the group was to clarify the improvements and changes required, to agree an inclusive process for the development of appropriate solutions, to clarify the specific business processes to be re-designed and agree the criteria for future administrative and academic structures. Input, directly and indirectly, from other Universities approaching similar issues was presented to the group enabling learning from beyond UWE as did bringing into focus the external context of higher education in the UK.

### Stage Two

#### Whole System Business Process Events

The Steering Group decided to hold a 'whole system business process review event'. The Steering Group appointed joint academic and professional service leads for each business process under review and over three days at an off-site venue a wide range of business process stakeholders were enabled (through transporting them to the venue) to help build the map of the processes including current state and contribute to the mapping of more effective and efficient processes. These stakeholder groups included staff at all levels and functions, students and trades union representatives.

# The Solution

## Stage Three

### Steering Group Review and Planning Meeting

The Steering Group came together to confirm the design criteria for the future design / organisational structure and to agree the business processes in scope. They established a project management infrastructure around each business process and a programme management framework to co-ordinate all projects. Lead individuals were identified for each of the 'in focus' business processes.

## Stage Four

### Business Process Project Groups

Project Groups commenced further and deeper analysis of business processes including current costs and developed proposals for revised, improved processes whilst continuing to engage and consult widely with their stakeholder populations as the plans were developed.

## Stage Five

### Business Process 'Star Chamber' Event

Each Business Process project lead presented process improvement recommendations to an extended Steering Group which included the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and trades union officials. Feedback was taken and incorporated prior to the projects being approved for implementation.

## Stage Six

### Organisation Design / Structure

Informed by greater clarity around the future shape of core business processes the Steering Group met to develop structures that would build a more effective interface between academic and administrative functions. A number of design options were considered based on the design criteria agreed.

The options were evaluated against the design criteria and a favoured option identified. Following further detailed financial analysis and testing with stakeholders and the Steering Group, these options were formally presented to the Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Group for approval and ultimately implemented.

## The Result

The business process improvement projects were implemented achieving required cost savings and with the potential to markedly improve the student experience.

There was agreement and subsequent implementation of the new academic and administrative structures, including the introduction of new key roles at this interface.

The Steering Group, comprised of Executive Deans, Heads of Service and Faculty Managers achieved a more collective and more holistic view of the University which provided the basis for important cross University collaboration and provided a living example of 'One University'. Many blocking and restraining issues and assumptions were highlighted and addressed as the process unfolded.

**In the view of Dr Richard O'Doherty, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Business, Change and Innovation:**



“We have emerged from an 18 month period of intense team working with new leaner and more focussed structures but much more importantly as One University. Heads of Services have moved beyond any silo mentality and Deans have shifted their mindsets to engage with central services in partnership.

As the Governing Body has noted, the Steering Group has been a microcosm example of 'One University' and has successfully delivered a huge cultural and structural change in the University. I can honestly say that Elementa Leadership played a massive part in our change programme. At every turn I was listened to and supported through some very difficult times. Their facilitation and 'real-time agile ability enabled us to stay the course.”

### Address

Elementa Leadership Limited

11 Collett Place

Latton

Swindon

Wiltshire

SN6 6EH

T 07957 136558

E [richard@elementaleadership.co.uk](mailto:richard@elementaleadership.co.uk)

W [www.elementaleadership.co.uk](http://www.elementaleadership.co.uk)

## About Us

Elementa Leadership is an organisation development consultancy with international cross-sectoral experience

For further information about our services and approach please contact Richard Sharpe on 07957 136558 or email [richard@elementaleadership.co.uk](mailto:richard@elementaleadership.co.uk)



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