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HEFCE, Leadership, Governance and  
Management Project 212



University of Wales, Newport  
Usk Way  
Newport  
Wales  
NP20 2BP

# Glossary

The i-MAP project has deployed and devised terms that may be open to interpretation and thus the following definitions are provided to avoid misunderstanding:

*Module:* A unit of study that is assigned a specific number of academic credits that contributes to the achievement of an award (in some countries this is referred to as a course).

*Course:* A combination of units or modules leading to a full academic award, typically a Masters degree or a Bachelors degree. In the documentation the terms programme and course are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

*Programme:* A combination of units or modules leading to a full academic award, typically a Masters degree or a Bachelors degree. In the documentation the terms programme and course are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

*Type A Course:* A new course or programme introduced by a higher education provider that is new to the institution but is widely available across the UK sector as a whole.

*Type B Course:* A new course or programme introduced by a higher education provider that is innovative and thus has few if any directly competitive courses across the UK sector as a whole.

*HEI:* A university or other Higher Education Institution.

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Visit [www.i-map.org.uk](http://www.i-map.org.uk) to download a variety of detailed reports and analyses including:

The Baseline Survey	A survey revealing practice and policy in over 60 HEIs
Analysis of UCAS data	New undergraduate course success rates and patterns
Analysis of HESA data	New full-time postgraduate course success rates and patterns
Case Studies	Further details of case studies referenced within the report

The website also includes a full report of the project with analysis published by The Knowledge Partnership designed primarily for those in the higher education marketing community.

# Executive Summary

The successful development and launch of new programmes is a vital activity for Higher Education. The financial sustainability of universities is dependent on recruiting sufficient numbers of students to innovative and excellent academic programmes. The i-MAP project set out to review the new programme development and launch processes within universities and to determine if there was any scope for improved efficiency.

The project found evidence of successful development of new programmes across the sector. However, analysis of UCAS and HESA data revealed that the majority of new programmes failed to attract sufficient numbers of applicants. In addition, “instant success” was highly predictive of sustained success. Contrary to common perception, starting with very low levels of admissions and then growing to viable numbers has been uncommon.

The sector can no longer afford to waste the development costs of new programmes that are

# 1 Introduction

## 2 Cost of New Programme Development

New programme development in Higher Education is both an extensive and costly activity. New programme development and associated portfolio management is a critical issue for most HEIs because:

- a) Successful programmes are increasingly important to the financial health of institutions.
- b) Unsuccessful programmes consume valuable resources that could be deployed more effectively to achieve other goals or support more successful programmes.

The i-MAP project found evidence of HEIs developing successful new programmes





## 4 Understanding the Market

The project explored possible reasons for the failure of new programmes. Programme titles were widely cited as a critical success factor by project participants, who recommended avoiding long or complex programme titles, or using terms likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience. The project recommends that universities should

# 5 Success Rate for New Postgraduate Programmes

HEIs were less confident about the success rate achieved by new

## 6 Launching New Programmes

The timing of when a new course is introduced to the market has a strong impact on success. Some HEIs have a strict timetable which plots each stage of development in a timeline working back from the critical marketing dates, such as prospectus publication deadlines. However, i-MAP found evidence that the timetable for new course development is sometimes not aligned with the recruitment cycle, so the timing of entry into the market becomes sub optimal; being too late for the UCAS application deadlines was an often cited example.

There is a perceived pressure to develop new programmes quickly and “go to market” in as short a timeframe as possible. Speed to market is often taken to be an indicator of innovation, enterprise and responsiveness. Late entry into the market is in part a function of this speed to market imperative but also reflects weak understanding in the sector about the impact of late market entry. There is little evidence that speed to market delivers success; the evidence points to a contrary conclusion.

The project recommends that senior leaders recognise that planning is important and make sure courses are not launched at the wrong time.

There should be rigorous scrutiny of proposals early in their development and senior leaders should be prepared where appropriate to stop proposals progressing into development as full new programmes or to hold them until an appropriate time for launch.

80% of the respondents to the baseline survey thought that the success rate of new



# 8 Innovation in New Programmes

New course concepts, particularly those of a more innovative nature, originate primarily from academics.

Having engaged with academic programme



# 10 Managing the Portfolio of Programmes

The I-MAP Project was originally focused on new programme development but it became clear that for best practice to be implemented this activity needed to take place within a wider portfolio management approach. There is evidence that many HEIs are seeking to rationalise the portfolio to bring clarity and efficiency. Around three quarters of HEIs declared a systematic process for reviewing the existing academic course portfolio; the case study visits reinforced this finding.

The factors that are most widely included in UK portfolio reviews of courses are financ

# 11 Improving Success in New Programme Development

The failure rate of new courses across the sector is higher than it needs to be but we are confident that it can be improved dramatically by the application of a more robust and staged process.



# 12 Key Recommendations

- 1 Universities should devise their own models for costing the development of new

# 12 Key Recommendations

- 11 The timetable for new course development should be aligned with the recruitment cycle, so the timing of entry into the market becomes optimal. (Section 6)
- 12 Senior leaders should recognise that planning is important and make sure courses

# 12 Key Recommendations

- 21 Recognise the importance of having an academic champion for a new programme development as a critical success factor. (Section 8)
- 22 Clarity who in the institution has the lead responsibility for stimulating new course ideas

For further information please contact

Professor Paul Coyle, Faculty of Arts and Business,  
City Campus, Usk Way, University of Wales,  
Newport, NP20 2BP, Wales, UK

+44 (0) 1633 432554

[paul.coyle@newport.ac.uk](mailto:paul.coyle@newport.ac.uk)