

The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research – Review Report

Project Title: Redesigning Courses in the Business School

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1. Introduction

This project takes its departure from the redesigning of the Business School's undergraduate course portfolio in accordance with the Oxford Brookes University Academic Programme Initiative (API). This redesign is based around the reorganisation of the Business School into five departments. Each of these departments is responsible for a single honours degree, with the exception of the Economics and International Business department, which contains three degrees (one of which is to be run in conjunction with the School of Social Sciences and Law) and the Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management department which contains two degrees. A number of the single honours degrees offered branch off into separate pathways after level four. In addition to the single honours degrees the School plans to offer one combined honours degree (to be combined with a variety of other programmes, all outside the School). All the degrees, with one exception, are due to be introduced in September 2010 (level four only) with level five and six being introduced in September 2011. The exception is the proposed new degree in Economics, Politics and International Relations, to be run with the School of Social Sciences and Law, referred to above.

The above changes can be summarised in the following table:

Table 1: Proposed New Undergraduate Course Portfolio for the Business School

Department	Degree Programme	Pathways within Degree
Accounting, Governance and Information Management	B.Sc Accounting and Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounting and Finance• Accounting and Information Management• Accounting and Business
Economics and International Business	B.Sc Business	Not Applicable
Economics and International Business	B.Sc. Economics, Finance and International Business	Not Applicable
Economics and International Business	B.Sc Economics, Politics and International Relations (to start September 2011)	Not Applicable
Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management	B.Sc International Hospitality Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Hospitality Management• International Hospitality and Tourism Management
Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management	B.Sc International Tourism Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International Tourism Management• International Hospitality and Tourism Management
Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour	B.Sc Management	Not Applicable
Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour	B.Sc/BA Business Management (combined honours degree)	Not Applicable
Marketing and Operations Management	BA Business and Marketing Management	Not Applicable

2. Progress of the Reinvention Centre Project

The above portfolio of courses was validated in May and June 2009 (with the exception of the Economics, Politics and International Relations degree). The first phase of the Business School Reinvention Centre Project consisted of work with Programme Development Teams (PDTs) on embedding undergraduate research into the course philosophy and documentation in the lead-up to the validation events. The starting point of this process was two Course Design Intensive day workshops for PDT members and other Business School staff, held on the 12th and 27th January 2009. At each of these I was available as School Reinvention Fellow (along with Pete Smith and Chris Rust from the Centre) to give advice on the issue of undergraduate research to course teams and to ask questions of teams with regard to their initial proposals.

This initial discussion then fed into the main body of work on designing the courses, which took place between February and April 2009. Each PDT was required to submit a statement on Undergraduate Research as part of the validation documentation (this statement did not go in the programme specification but in a set of supporting statements appended to the specification) and my main role during these three months was to discuss with PDTs how they intended to approach the issue and how undergraduate research would be embedded in the curriculum, in the light of the ideas of the Centre, university policies (especially with regard to research pathways) and the pedagogic rationale of the degree courses more generally. The outcomes of these discussions are detailed below. At this stage of the project it has proved to be rather difficult to isolate general themes, as the issues under consideration remain somewhat fluid; hence I have simply treated each degree programme on a case by case basis.

A. B.Sc Accounting and Finance

This is one of the areas in the School where most work remains to be done. The issue here is that of heavy accreditation requirements from professional bodies which have squeezed the space available at level five for modules explicitly focused on undergraduate research. This raises the possibility that students will undergo problems when carrying out such research in the level six honours modules which do have this focus (either the dissertation or accounting synoptic module). A priority over the next year, therefore, is discussion with the prospective module leaders for the level five compulsory modules on Management Accounting, Corporate Finance and Financial Accounting and Reporting, to look at ways in which undergraduate research can be incorporated in these modules in order to prepare students for research activity at level six. A positive aspect of this programme, however, is the use of Contemporary Issues in Finance, as a compulsory honours module at level six for students on the Accounting and Finance pathway. This module in its rewritten form is explicitly based on the ideas of the Reinvention Centre and on group and individual research activity into current financial developments, in part reported through wiki sites.

B. B.Sc Business

There is a clear research pathway on the Business degree with students being introduced to basic tools of research at level four both in a more technical form in Analytical Techniques in Business and Management and in a more general way in the core modules on International Business Context and Introduction to Management. These are then developed further through the Research Methods module at level five and form the basis for the Business Synoptic module at level six, which is centred on case-study based research activity. This pathway sets out the groundwork for research in the area of Business while at level six students can also engage in more specialised research activity focused on particular kinds of research in the business area. These include academic research into business topics (Dissertation module), research into new markets and products (Entrepreneurial Business Management), research into organisations (Consultancy Project) and extension of case study research into the international arena (International Business Case Studies).

C. B.Sc Economics, Finance and International Business

There is a clear research pathway for this degree, which offers some exciting possibilities for development of the ideas of the Reinvention Centre. At level four students will be introduced to research activity through the module on Skills for Economic Enquiry and the approaches taken up here will be developed further at level five in the module Skills and Knowledge of a Graduate Economist. Both of these are explicitly based on students seeing themselves as active researchers. At level six the synoptic module for the degree builds on this and is based on an in-company project undertaken abroad through a field trip. Students will undertake research activity during this project and will then reflect on this experience and analyse it further during the course of the module. They will also have the opportunity to extend their research activity through an independent study project if they wish to do so.

D. B.Sc Economics, Politics and International Relations

This degree is currently at an earlier stage of development than the other programmes discussed here. However, it will draw on the ideas embodied in the Economics, Finance and International Business degree programme, as discussed above and on the new Politics and International Relations degree recently validated in the School of Social Sciences and Law. The latter has a clear research pathway embedded within it, through compulsory modules in research methods and political analysis at level five and a compulsory dissertation at level six. More generally, the Economics, Politics and International Relations degree offers exciting possibilities for developing interdisciplinary undergraduate research through a cross-school collaboration.

E. B.Sc International Hospitality Management

Unfortunately I have not been able to have such detailed discussions with colleagues from Hospitality and Tourism as with the majority of other departments within the Business School over the last six months. This has partly been for locational reasons (this part of the School is based at Headington) and partly because a number of complex organisational questions which arose during the course planning process left the staff involved with less time for discussions with me. However, the structure which has emerged for the degree programme has a clear research pathway, based around a research methods module, Methods of Enquiry for Hospitality and Tourism, at level five and the compulsory research project at level six. Over the next year I will be discussing with colleagues in this department how these two modules can best be used to develop undergraduate research.

F. B.Sc International Tourism Management

Essentially the same comments apply to this degree programme as for the B.Sc International Hospitality Management discussed above.

G. B.Sc Management

There is a clear research pathway for this degree which at level four and level five parallels in many ways that for the B.Sc in Business, with the same core modules at level four and Research Methods at level five. At level six the compulsory module on Critical Perspectives in Management is explicitly based around developing students as active researchers examining contemporary debates in the area of management. As with the B.Sc in Business they then have the opportunity to undertake more specialised research either in consultancy, in entrepreneurial activity or through an independent study module.

H. BA/B.Sc Business Management (combined degree)

The approach to undergraduate research adopted for the combined honours degree is very much modelled on the B.Sc Business and B.Sc Management degrees but with the necessary adaptations made for the combined nature of the degree. Students will be introduced to the fundamental nature of

undergraduate research activity in the core level four module Introduction to Business and Management; will develop this further at level five in Research Methods and will work as active researchers in the compulsory Business Management Synoptic at level six. Again they will have the opportunity to develop more specific research activity in areas such as consultancy, entrepreneurial activity or in a more academic way through the dissertation module at level six.

I. BA Business and Marketing Management

This degree programme contains exciting possibilities for developing undergraduate research in the curriculum. Marketing is an explicitly research based activity and this has been recognised in the past in the module on Marketing Research. While that module will not exist in its current form in the new programme, colleagues in this area are very interested in developing undergraduate research activity through the new core double modules in Principles of Marketing Management at level five and in Strategic Marketing Management at level six. Discussion about how best to do this will be a priority over the next year. Such undergraduate research will be based on the new level four module Foundations for Academic Success.

3. The Next Stages of the Project

The experience of the last six months suggests the following as the main priorities for taking the project forward over the remainder of this year.

- Discussion with colleagues in Accounting and Finance about the best way to ensure that undergraduate research is embedded in their degrees given the lack of explicit research methods modules there
- Establishment of closer links with colleagues in Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism management to ensure the best possible use of their research related modules.
- Further discussion with colleagues in Marketing to build on the enthusiasm for undergraduate research which exists in that area of the Business School.
- Movement of the project on from consideration of course structure to discussion of the other elements put forward in the original project proposal, namely (i) an undergraduate research conference for the School and (ii) an undergraduate research E-Newsletter to be produced in the School and distributed to external stakeholders, for example employers.

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