QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project Pillars of Impact: Development and Evaluation of Curriculum Design

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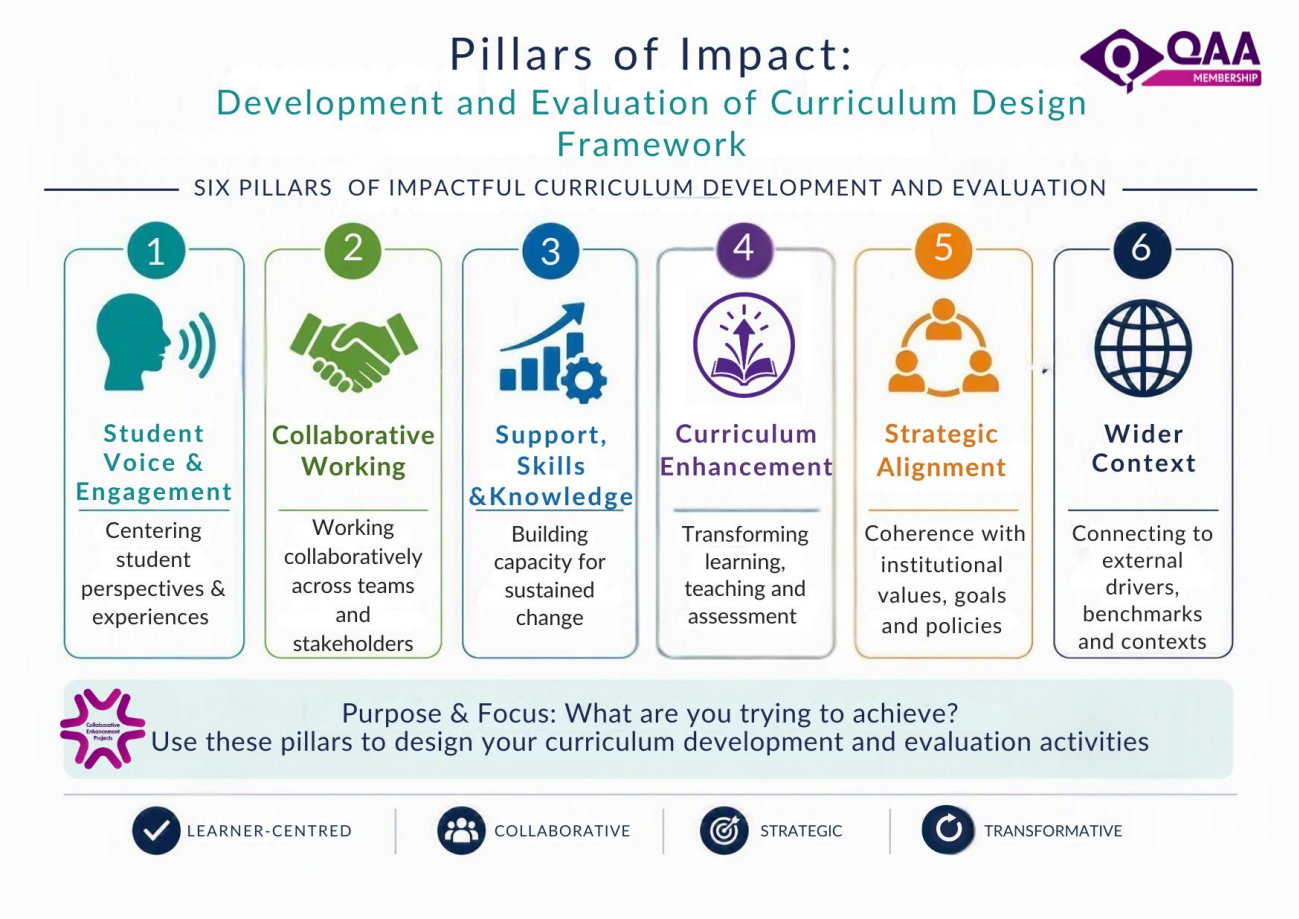
Pillars of Impact: Development and Evaluation of Curriculum Design Framework



Purpose & Vision

A framework informed, owned and championed by the sector

Higher Education is undergoing significant curriculum transformation to meet evolving student needs, institutional requirements, societal challenges, and other external demands. Yet the complexity, labour, and impact of the vital process of curriculum development and evaluation of this work can be hard to surface and make visible. Changes in ways of working which happen during the process are more difficult to measure, quantify and surface than tangible outputs, such as impact on student outcomes.

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A research project funded by the QAA Collaborative Enhancement Fund 2025-26 was conducted by Educational Developers from the SEDA Curriculum Development Network (CDN) to raise the profile of curriculum design and the evaluation of that process. This framework is one of the outputs from the project. It has been informed by cross-institutional reflections, drawing on a UK-wide survey and feedback from the wider sector networks, including the SEDA Curriculum Development Network and QAA Programme Leaders network. It will help you consider what you are trying to achieve with your own curriculum transformation right at the start of the process and the intended impact, so that you can then use the framework to support your decision-making and design appropriate curriculum development and evaluation activities using the pillars and prompts.

Rather than provide yet another externally designed blueprint, this framework has been informed by the sector knowledge and insights. The six pillars aim to help all stakeholders* involved in the design process to consider how they can design and evaluate this work. The framework aims to make curriculum transformation more visible, both as it unfolds and in retrospect, providing a structure for design, reflection and evaluation at each stage. It can also help staff to articulate their contribution and gain recognition for this often challenging and invisible work.

The framework contains six pillars and a menu of prompts under each pillar. Depending on the particular curriculum development and evaluation task you have, you may use one or two or all pillars. The prompts underneath each pillar are not meant to be exhaustive and you can pick and choose which ones are most relevant for this task. Please see the case studies at the end of this document which will give you an idea of how the framework has been applied by the Collaborative Project Partners.

*We are defining stakeholders as all those with a stake in the curriculum design process, for example academics, students, professional staff, university leadership, professional bodies, and other external stakeholders such as employers and community networks. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but provides some examples to explain each reference in this framework.

Purpose

The overall purpose of the framework is to support the design and evaluation of institutional curriculum design processes, activities and initiatives in order to enhance the impact of this work. It moves beyond traditional metrics to capture diverse drivers of effective change. Specifically, it aims to:

- Build institutional expertise in enhancing design and impact evaluation practice across multiple stakeholder groups.
- Support evaluation activity through evidencing the value of curriculum design activities in wider institutional and sector debates.

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- Future-proof curricula through proactively scaffolding strategic curriculum design and evaluation processes and approaches.

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Why It Matters

Curriculum design is fundamental to institutional sustainability, student success, and higher education's relevance in a rapidly changing world. This framework raises the profile of curriculum design work and processes, makes visible the often-unseen labour involved, and equips all stakeholders to reflect on their roles and enhance their contributions. It centres student voice and engagement within the design process and moves beyond compliance to harness routine curriculum development to drive innovation.

The Six Pillars

The framework comprises six interconnected pillars that together provide a comprehensive lens for developing, applying, implementing and evaluating curriculum design processes and activities:

1. **Student Voice and Engagement** – Centering student perspectives and experiences in decision-making.
2. **Collaborative Working** – Working collaboratively across teams and stakeholders.
3. **Support, Skills and Knowledge** – Building staff capacity for sustainable change.
4. **Curriculum Enhancement** – Transforming learning, teaching and assessment practice.
5. **Strategic Alignment** – Coherence with institutional values, goals and policies.
6. **Wider Context** – Connecting to external drivers, benchmarks and contexts.

Using the Framework

Each pillar includes targeted prompt questions that guide stakeholders through the process of curriculum design, critical reflection and evaluation. The framework is flexible and context-responsive, recognising that institutions, staff and stakeholders will prioritise and apply pillars differently based on their unique circumstances. The framework centres the importance of evaluation as part of the design process itself, to be considered at the start of all work and not an afterthought.

Prompts can serve multiple purposes. They can be used as a lens for planning curriculum design activities, as a roadmap to support structured curriculum design processes, to identify fit-for-purpose methods to evaluate the impact of these curriculum design activities and to generate evaluation and research questions to evidence the impact of curriculum change. Case studies from the Collaborative Enhancement Project Partners illustrate how the pillars work in practice and provide evidence-based insights into successful curriculum design approaches.

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Impact

By using this framework institutional leaders, academics across disciplines, students and support staff can:

- Support the university staff and stakeholder community to enhance curriculum design processes through structured planning and evaluation right from the start.
- Provide opportunities for staff to enhance their own professional development, profile and recognition both internally and externally
- Identify gaps and opportunities in curriculum design processes
- Enhance collaboration and stakeholder engagement
- Improve student outcomes and experiences
- Demonstrate the strategic value of investing in structured curriculum design processes
- Contribute to sector-wide knowledge and best practice through contributions to the SEDA Curriculum Development Network sessions and resources (join the network by clicking on the JISCMAIL SEDACD Network list)

Next Steps

We invite institutions across the sector to engage with this framework, adapt it to your contexts, and share your experiences through the SEDA CD Network. Our in-person events, online discussions and Padlet resource platform will provide ongoing opportunities to explore the use of the framework and how it applies in your context. We hope to be able to build up a body of case studies for colleagues to refer to and a panel to review the framework in the future. You can join the network here at Link to join the SEDACD Network list . Together, we can elevate the visibility, importance and impact of curriculum design processes, share this good practice, help inform your own ways of working in the curriculum development space, and create transformative learning experiences for all students.

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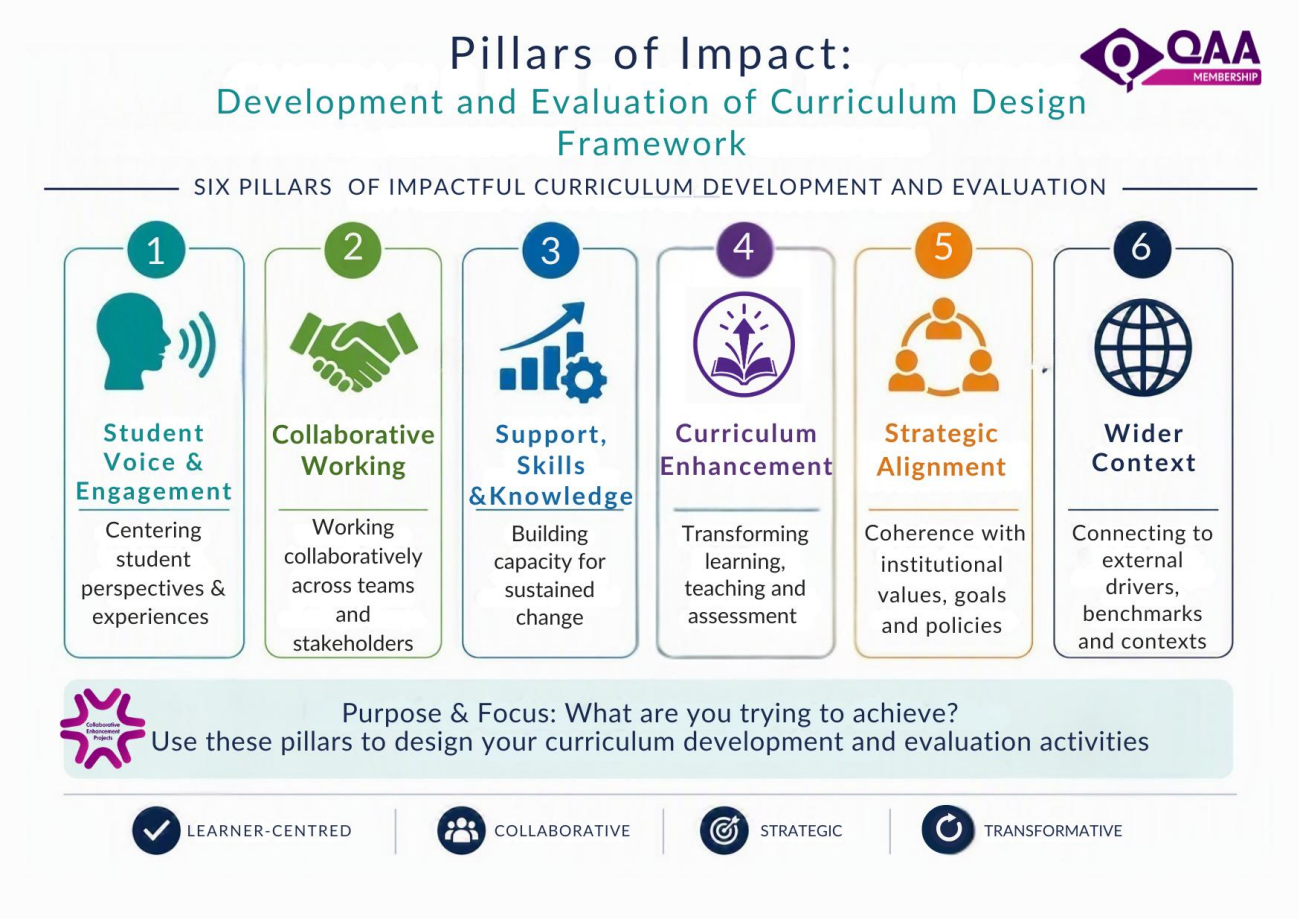

Pillar 1 - Student Voice and Engagement

Definition

Actively centring and engaging with diverse student perspectives and experiences throughout the curriculum design process.

Prompts

The themed questions below encourage stakeholders to move beyond tokenistic consultation toward meaningful engagement and partnership with students in curriculum transformation.

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Inclusivity, Representation and Power

- How can we engage students meaningfully in curriculum design, for example through staff and student partnership or co-design?
- How and when are students genuinely involved in shaping curriculum decisions, not just consulted after decisions are made?
- Whose voices are we hearing and how are we actively seeking perspectives from the underrepresented or disengaged?
- What barriers might prevent some students from sharing their experiences and getting involved in the curriculum design process, and how are we addressing these?

Mechanisms & Opportunities

- What formal and informal channels exist for students to share their perspectives on the curriculum? How accessible, inclusive and culturally responsive are these feedback mechanisms?
- What evidence are we gathering about the impact of curriculum change on students' learning experiences and achievement?
- How do we ensure that we are we asking students who are involved in the curriculum design process, what matters most to them, rather than only what we think is important?
- How can we build opportunities beyond the traditional student voice mechanisms to support ongoing meaningful engagement with students beyond the initial curriculum design process?

Student Expectations & Choices

- How are changing student expectations, needs and preferences (value for money, flexibility, experience) shaping the curriculum?
- How can you have a conversation with students during the process to clarify expectations and explain why it is not always possible or appropriate to act on all their suggestions?

Building Student Agency

How does the curriculum transformation itself help students develop skills in advocacy, reflection, and self-direction?
How are students equipped and supported to articulate their learning needs and preferences?

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Ethical Considerations

How do we ensure student participation is adequately compensated, and they are provided with safe spaces for honest contributions where their privacy is respected?

Pillar 2 - Collaborative Working

Definition

Building collaborative ways of working on curriculum design across course teams and central departments and engaging with external stakeholders. Enabled by a collaborative infrastructure, time and space.

Prompts

These questions help stakeholders examine whether collaboration is genuinely adding value to curriculum transformation and creating sustainable partnerships rather than just additional meetings or bureaucracy. The prompts are split into two sections here: the first three for the design and evaluation during the process and the final set for a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of the changes made.

Sustainable Partnership Structures

- How can course teams be supported to work in collaboration effectively?
- What formal structures (committees, working groups, teams) support cross-departmental collaboration?
- How are roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority distributed and negotiated across stakeholders involved in curriculum design?
- How can you promote effective professional services and academic joint working approaches to support the transformation process?
- What platforms and practices facilitate ongoing dialogue rather than one-way communication?

Stakeholder Engagement

- Which stakeholders (internal and external) are involved in the curriculum design process and who is missing?

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- How do you engage external stakeholders (e.g. employers, community partners, professional bodies) in curriculum development?
- What mechanisms ensure regular, meaningful dialogue between different stakeholder groups?
- What role do digital technologies play in enabling collaborative working?

Trust & Collective Ownership

- What shared values and/or goals unite diverse partners despite their different perspectives and priorities?
- How do we create a working culture where stakeholders feel enabled to have creative and honest conversations about challenges and disagreements?
- Do all stakeholders feel ownership of the curriculum design process, or do some see it as "someone else's project"?
- How can diverse perspectives be heard and constructive disagreements be surfaced and considered?

Longitudinal Impact Evaluation

- How can you evaluate the impact of collaborative working on the delivery/implementation of the new/refreshed curriculum?
- What measures/evidence could you use to evaluate the impact of the collaborative working process on the new/refreshed curriculum?
- How are collaborative relationships maintained beyond initial design and implementation phases?

Pillar 3 - Support, Skills and Knowledge

Definition

Developing lasting capabilities that translate into embedded practice changes and improved outcomes.

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Prompts

These questions encourage institutional leadership to think systemically about building lasting staff capability rather than just delivering initial training. They prompt consideration of the indicators that skills and knowledge are translating into changed practice and improved outcomes.

Capacity Assessment & Resourcing

- What existing skills and knowledge do staff currently have that can support curriculum transformation?
- How are gaps between current capabilities and future requirements identified? What actions are taken to address them?
- What resources (time, funding, materials, technology) are required to build, refresh and update skills as the curriculum continues to evolve?

Development & Training

- What professional development opportunities are needed to build confidence and competence in the new curriculum approach?
- How do we ensure training is ongoing rather than one-off, to embed sustainable practice?
- What mix of formal training, peer learning, and experiential development would work best for different staff groups?
- How accessible are development opportunities to all staff who need them, including part-time or geographically dispersed teams?

Knowledge Sharing & Communities

- How do we capture and share emerging expertise and good practice as implementation progresses?
- How can we build communities of practice around the transformed curriculum?

Sustainability Planning

- What systems will maintain capability as people move roles or leave the organisation?

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Pillar 4 - Curriculum Enhancement

Definition

Curriculum enhancements and change that transform teaching and learning quality and experiences.

Prompts

These questions help stakeholders move beyond describing what has changed (e.g. the content, the learning, teaching and assessment strategy), to examining how strategic curriculum change in learning, teaching and assessment practice is genuinely affecting the quality and nature of learning and teaching.

Vision & Purpose

- What are we trying to achieve through this curriculum change or enhancement?
- How will the curriculum change result in a different experience for learners?
- What pedagogical principles or educational theories underpin the transformation?
- What is the learning, teaching and assessment approach?

Learning and Teaching Practice

- How are teaching methods, approaches and use of learning spaces changing?
- What balance exists between content coverage and deep learning or skills development?
- How will all learners experience the curriculum differently? What new opportunities or challenges will they encounter?
- How are learning and teaching experiences becoming more inclusive and equitable for your diverse student learners?

Assessment & Feedback

- How are formative and summative assessment approaches changing to align with revised learning outcomes?
- What forms of feedback support the intended learning, and how frequently does this occur?

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Content & Structure

- What is being added, removed, or reorganised within the curriculum? Why?
- What disciplinary content is being taught and how is the curriculum structured?
- How are connections across topics, modules, levels of study, or disciplines being strengthened, scaffolded or changed?
- How does your curriculum engage with diverse perspectives, knowledges and real-world issues and challenges?

Indicators of Success

- What student outcomes (completion, continuation, retention, progression to graduate outcomes) indicate successful transformation?

Pillar 5 - Strategic Alignment

Definition

Curriculum transformation that is embedded within and advances institutional strategic goals.

Prompts

These questions help stakeholders ensure curriculum transformation is not happening in isolation but is genuinely embedded within and contributing to the institution's broader strategic direction.

Vision & Purpose Alignment

- How does this curriculum transformation connect to the institution's overall strategic vision and mission?
- What institutional priorities (e.g. widening access and participation; enhancing teaching quality; skills-based education; improving students' employability; innovation and collaboration; community engagement) does the transformation support?
- Is the strategic rationale for change clearly and consistently communicated?

Institutional Values, Policies & Framework Coherence

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- How are institutional values (e.g. equity, innovation, sustainability) reflected in the curriculum transformation?
- How does the curriculum transformation align with institutional policies on learning and teaching, assessment, quality assurance?
- Are there tensions or gaps identified between the transformation and existing institutional values, policies and frameworks and if so, how are these being resolved?

Long-Term Sustainability

- How does the curriculum change contribute to institutional resilience and future readiness?
- What happens if institutional priorities shift? Is the transformation adaptable or rigid?
- What processes/frameworks do you have that support institutional curriculum change and are they resilient to future changes?

Measuring Strategic Contribution

- How can KPIs and metrics be used to measure the contribution to strategic objectives made by institutional curriculum processes?
- How do we know the transformation is worth the investment from a strategic perspective?
- What course adaptation mechanisms exist if strategic priorities evolve?

Pillar - 6- Wider Context

Definition

Curriculum transformation that responds to current external drivers while anticipating future challenges, preparing graduates not just for today's workplace and society, but for contexts that are still emerging, including the pace of technological and societal change.

Prompts

These questions help stakeholders ensure curriculum transformation is outward-facing and contextually responsive to the developments and needs of industry, employment, research, professional and regulatory bodies, the HE sector and the political and cultural landscape. This encourages the curriculum to be future focussed, prevents it from becoming insular or disconnected from the environments in which students will live and work and ensures graduates are equipped for society and the workplace.

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External Drivers, Industry & Employment Needs

- How are we responding to the external factors (policy changes, regulatory requirements, sector trends, professional standards, accreditation, quality frameworks) which are shaping this curriculum transformation?
- How will the curriculum develop skills and knowledge which prepare students for the workforce now and as industries and professions evolve?
- What employer feedback or workforce intelligence is informing curriculum design?

Societal Needs & Technological Change

- How does the curriculum equip students to engage with major societal challenges (e.g. climate crisis, technological disruption, social inequality, global health)?

Demographic, Global & Cultural Contexts

- How does the curriculum reflect globalisation, internationalisation, and cultural diversity and prepare students for work and life in interconnected, multicultural contexts?
- How are diverse perspectives, knowledges, and worldviews represented in curriculum content and delivery?
- How is the curriculum responding to changing student demographics and diverse populations (age, background, modes of study, non-traditional learners, lifelong learning needs or changing participation patterns/multimodality)?

Policy & Regulatory Environment

- How are current government policies or future policy directions (funding, quality assurance, access targets) influencing curriculum decisions?
- What compliance obligations shape curriculum design, and how do we balance these with educational vision?

Disciplinary Evolution & Sector Benchmarking

- How is the curriculum responding to advances in knowledge, research, or professional practice in the discipline?
- How does our curriculum compare to similar programmes at other institutions nationally or internationally- are we leading, following, or keeping pace?

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Anticipating Future Context

- What scenarios or trends might shape the context five or ten years from now?
- How adaptable and flexible is the transformed curriculum to unforeseen changes in external context?

Evidence & Intelligence Gathering

- What sources of external intelligence (employment market data, policy analysis, sector reports, employer surveys) inform our understanding of context?
- How regularly do we scan the external environment to identify relevant changes or opportunities?

Balancing Internal & External Demands

- How do we balance external demands with internal educational values and academic autonomy?

Impact Case Studies

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The following case studies from each of our collaborative partners provide some evidence of how the framework has been applied to a wide range of different curriculum development and enhancement contexts. These will hopefully provide you with some inspiration about how you might apply the pillars to your own curriculum development projects. These are summarised below.

Kingston University investigated how all of the six Pillars of Impact provided an opportunity to retrospectively assess the relevance of using the framework within a recent curriculum revalidation and redesign of a large suite of undergraduate science courses and its potential to support future curriculum development, review, and evaluation.

The **University of Brighton** used the Collaborative Working pillar of the framework to explore the impact of roles and infrastructure for sustainable partnership working, ways of engaging stakeholders meaningfully, and building safe spaces for trust and collective ownership. Using the POI has enabled a shorter-term impact evaluation of the work of the L&T Hub who facilitate the Co:Lab Curriculum Design Process.

The **University of Edinburgh** used the framework to prompt reflections about the design of "Challenge Courses" which are institution-wide interdisciplinary courses providing an opportunity for students to explore and build understanding of globally significant themes and topics from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The framework, particularly the Student Voice and Engagement Pillar, was used to prompt discussions about how it could support future course activities.

The **University of Staffordshire** used the Pillars to explore the role of the module leader in the process of curriculum development and re-development, specifically how they used the pillars to reflect and evaluate on their involvement in the re-design of new modules as part of the institutions new Curriculum Framework.

The **University of Warwick** reviewed the framework to establish its utility, feasibility, appropriateness and acceptability for curriculum development and enhancement work, with a particular focus on how the Wider Context and Strategic Alignment pillars might structure curriculum conversations in practice.

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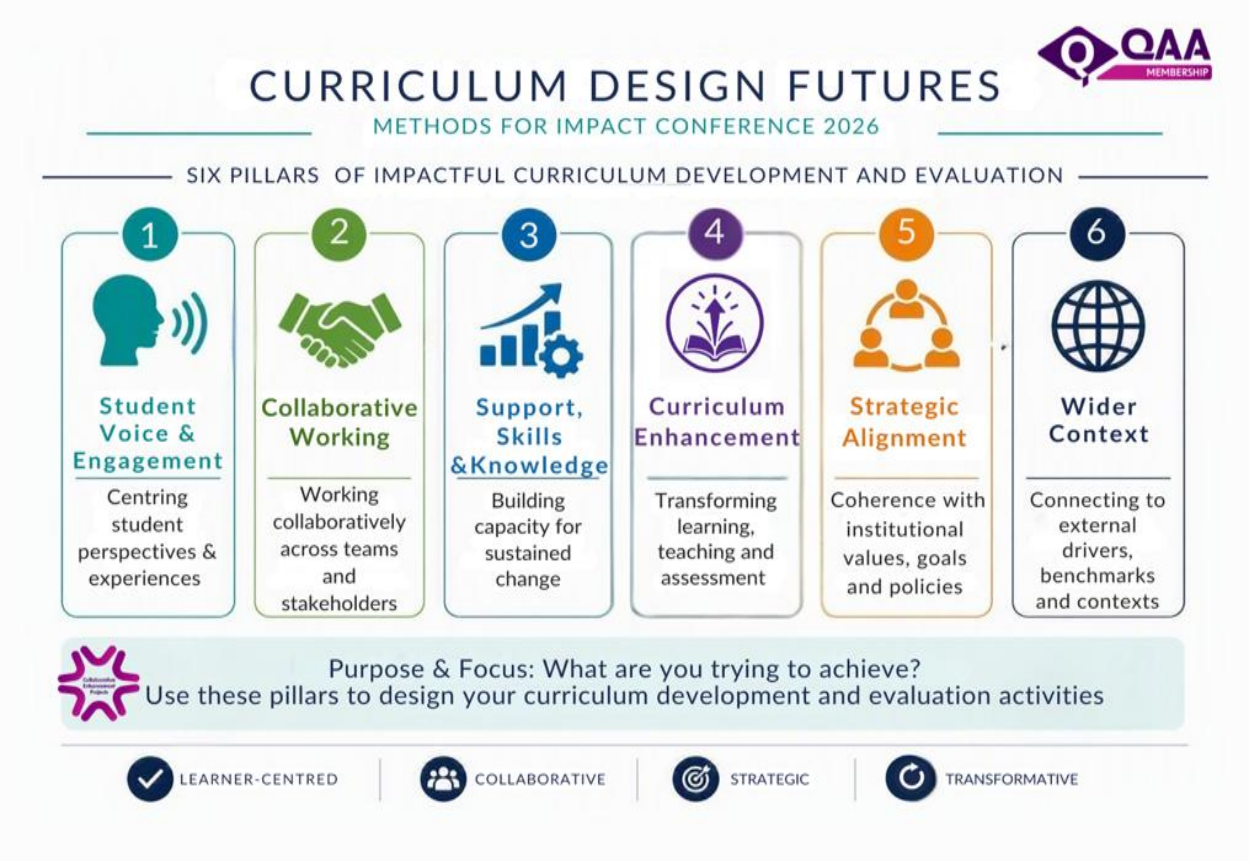
Case Study 1: Kingston University London

Case Study 1: Applying the Six Pillars of Impact to Re-design a New School Wide Curriculum: How Good Were We?

Dr Hilary Wason, Head of Curriculum Development and Enhancement, Kingston University
Dr Emma Higginbotham, Lecturer, Department of Geography, Geology and the Environment, Kingston University

Our Curriculum Design Challenge

This case study is based on a retrospective evaluation of the application of the 6 Pillars of Impactful Curriculum Development and Evaluation Framework at a post-92 institution seeking to ensure that academic programmes remain current, coherent and aligned with institutional priorities, sector expectations and the evolving needs of students and employers. This study builds on the preliminary sector-wide survey involving 41 higher education professionals which identified the key ingredients of effective curriculum design and impact evaluation through a sector-wide questionnaire, leading to the development of the Pillars of Impact Framework (POI).



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Our Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore how the six Pillars of Impact were reflected within the recent curriculum revalidation and redesign of a suite of undergraduate science programmes at Kingston University. Rather than focusing on a single pillar, the study took a holistic perspective, examining how all six pillars informed curriculum design, delivery, and the intended student experience. The programmes, revalidated in October 2024 and implemented from September 2025, provided an opportunity to retrospectively assess the relevance of the framework and its potential to support future curriculum development, review, and evaluation.

Data were collected from seven purposively selected participants who had been directly involved in the programme revalidation process. Five semi-structured individual interviews and one group interview were conducted to capture participants' experiences and reflections on curriculum development and the application of the Pillars of Impact. Interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis approach, enabling the identification of key themes relating to curriculum design and decision-making. The analysis highlighted four overarching themes: the role of student voice and influence, negotiating professional body expectations, navigating change, and managing tensions. These themes informed the structure of the findings and provided insight into how the framework supported, and could further enhance, curriculum development and revalidation in the future.

Findings

"The Silent Majority" – The Role of Student Voice and Influence

While student voice is institutionally embedded as a driver of enhancement and discussed in detail in the Town House Strategy and Active Participation Plan at Kingston University, it often remains structurally constrained, unevenly distributed, and disproportionately influenced and shaped by a vocal student minority, leaving the "silent majority" of students largely unrepresented in curriculum decision-making:

> "you're always dealing with those really engaged students"
> (Course Leader, Participant 5)

Student voice emerged as a significant influence on curriculum revalidation. Participants described it as both a formal requirement and a practical driver of change, with feedback from mechanisms such as module evaluations, the NSS, and direct student consultation often prompting curriculum review and redesign. Student input was used not only to identify areas for improvement but also to shape teaching approaches, assessment methods, and broader learning experiences, reinforcing a commitment to student-centred curriculum development. Participants also highlighted the importance of student voice and engagement in ensuring curricula are inclusive and responsive to diverse student needs, including those of commuters, carers, and students balancing study with employment.

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However, participants questioned how representative student voice processes are in practice. Feedback often came from a relatively small group of engaged students, while the perspectives of less engaged or harder-to-reach students were frequently absent. Low survey response rates, limited participation opportunities, and a lack of confidence among some students to contribute in formal settings, all contributed to concerns that student voice may only reflect part of the student experience and only a few of the students. As a result, participants raised questions about how institutions can better engage the "silent majority" and ensure that curriculum decisions are informed by a wider range of perspectives.

Although a range of methods were used to gather and embed student voice, including surveys, meetings, workshops, and consultation activities, participants felt these approaches were often fragmented and inconsistently applied. There was a shared view that student voice should move beyond periodic consultation towards a more continuous and inclusive process, with clearer feedback loops and greater efforts to engage underrepresented groups.

Negotiating Professional Body Expectations and the Wider Context

Across the data, participants described curriculum revalidation as a continual process of balancing the expectations of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), industry partners, institutional strategies, and educational values. While professional bodies were often seen as essential in maintaining standards, accreditation, and employability, they were also perceived as placing limitations on the scope for curriculum innovation. At the same time, participants recognised the growing influence of wider contextual factors, including workforce demands, employer expectations, student needs, and broader societal changes. The findings therefore suggest that curriculum revalidation involves navigating a complex network of influences, requiring course teams to balance professional relevance, educational purpose, and institutional priorities:

> “One of the biggest constraints on curriculum design is our accrediting bodies” (Course Leader, Participant 5)

The findings suggest that curriculum revalidation is influenced by a wide network of stakeholders that work beyond the university, including employers, industry partners, accrediting bodies, and students. Participants described curriculum revalidation as a process of balancing internal priorities with external expectations to ensure programmes remain relevant and responsive to changing workforce needs. Professional bodies and industry partners were seen as particularly important in providing guidance on disciplinary developments, skills requirements, and employability, helping programme teams align curricula with current and future sector demands.

At the same time, participants highlighted the complexity of responding to multiple and sometimes competing influences. Curriculum decisions were shaped not only by accreditation requirements and employer expectations but also by student needs, institutional strategies, and broader social factors.

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Many described curriculum revalidations as a continuous process of negotiation, requiring teams to consider a range of interconnected issues while maintaining programme quality and relevance:

> "Where does the student voice in the wider context of all of these things going on in their life, like cost of living, home, not or not living away from it, where does it fit?" (Participant 3)

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) emerged as especially influential in curriculum revalidation. While accreditation was valued for maintaining professional standards and graduate employability, participants also viewed it as a constraint on curriculum flexibility. Requirements from accrediting bodies could limit the scope for innovation and influence decisions about programme structure and assessment. However, some participants suggested that these restrictions were not always as rigid as assumed and that effective dialogue with professional bodies could create opportunities for adaptation and innovation. Overall, successful curriculum revalidation was seen as dependent on balancing professional requirements, institutional priorities, educational values, and the needs of students and employers.

Navigating Change: Staff Perspectives on Support and Curriculum Revalidation

Across the interviews and group interview, participants discussed how tensions were experienced and managed during revalidation, focusing on resistance, structural challenges, and the balance between institutional expectations and everyday teaching practice:

> "Some conversations were difficult… it wasn't an easy process" (Participant 4)

Curriculum revalidation was experienced as a complex process shaped by institutional structures, staff relationships, and local contexts. Participants described a range of challenges, including changing requirements, evolving guidance, and the practical demands of implementing curriculum change alongside existing teaching responsibilities. In some cases, changes in institutional requirements meant that courses had to be revised more than once, creating additional work for staff. However, participants also acknowledged that revalidation provided valuable opportunities to review programmes, reconsider assessment practices, and strengthen curriculum coherence. Although the process could be demanding, many recognised its potential to enhance the student experience and encourage constructive reflection on programme design.

A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring that curriculum changes remained meaningful and evidence informed. Participants expressed a need for greater transparency around the rationale for institutional decisions and welcomed opportunities for discussion and feedback throughout the process. These comments reflected not only concerns about decision-making but also a strong

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commitment to maintaining academic quality and ensuring that any changes benefitted student experience and development. Moreover, examples emerged of colleagues engaging thoughtfully with change and finding ways to work collaboratively through areas of disagreement which in turn helped manage tensions. Furthermore, participants described how curriculum redesign often involved negotiation and compromise, particularly where academic staff held strong views about disciplinary content or established approaches to teaching and assessment:

> "Things in one department work quite well, and it was driven by good leadership." (Participant 1)

Overall, the findings suggest that tensions are an inherent part of curriculum revalidation. Resistance emerged as a common feature of the revalidation process, although participants generally viewed it as a response to increased workload, uncertainty, and disruption to established practices rather than opposition to change itself. Engaging colleagues in curriculum redesign often required negotiation and compromise, particularly where staff felt a strong sense of ownership over existing modules and programmes. Furthermore, the findings suggest that tensions are an inherent part of curriculum revalidation. Addressing these tensions through clear communication, meaningful involvement, and appropriate support may help foster more positive and sustainable approaches to curriculum change and revalidation. However, alongside the challenges, participants identified examples of effective leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and successful staff engagement. These findings indicate that clear communication, meaningful involvement, and appropriate support can help transform tensions into productive dialogue, fostering more positive and sustainable approaches to curriculum change and revalidation

Application of the Pillars

The six Pillars of Impact were developed as a framework to support the design, evaluation and enhancement of curricula in higher education institutions. By encouraging those working in curriculum revalidation to consider factors such as student voice and engagement, building sustained capacity and confidence through staff development initiatives and connecting with the wider context and institutional goals, the pillars aim to support the development of curricula that enhance both student experience and outcomes.

Participants viewed the pillars positively, describing them as a useful reference point for curriculum design and review. Whilst they were not always applied in a formal or systematic way, many of the participants felt that the framework provided a helpful guide for decision-making and reflective practice. Participants also highlighted the value of the pillars in supporting discussions across and within teams, offering a shared framework that often helped those involved in curriculum design and review to identify areas of improvement and articulate strengths.

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"They're useful as a kind of checklist in your head, you might not follow them step by step, but they're there when you're making decisions" (Course Leader, P4).

The findings further suggested that the pillars can help promote a more holistic understanding of curriculum design by drawing attention to often overlooked aspects of the process, including stakeholder engagement, professional body requirements, staff development, and institutional support. Participants saw potential for the framework to be used not only for evaluation but also as a planning and enhancement tool, supporting more intentional curriculum development. Several also noted that continued use across different institutions and disciplines would help refine the framework and strengthen its value as both an evaluative and developmental resource.

Future Plans: Developing the Application of the Pillars

Drawing on the findings of this case study and participants' reflections on curriculum revalidation, the following recommendations are proposed to support more effective curriculum transformation and to enhance the application of the Pillars of Impact Framework in our institution. We will integrate the **Six Pillars of Impactful Curriculum Development and Evaluation Framework** into our validation, curriculum review and enhancement support offer as both a Planning Tool as well as an Evaluation Framework right from the start of the process. Using the pillars and supporting prompts to inform initial planning discussions could help curriculum teams consider student voice, stakeholder engagement, support requirements, strategic priorities, and wider contextual factors from the outset of curriculum development.

Action	Detail
Use the pillars as a planning tool as well as an evaluation framework	Introduce the Pillars of Impact Framework at the beginning of curriculum projects, not solely during evaluation and build an evaluation mechanism for this work right at the start. Use the pillars to inform initial planning discussions to help curriculum teams consider student voice, stakeholder engagement, support requirements, strategic priorities, and wider contextual factors from the outset of curriculum development.
Develop more inclusive approaches to student engagement	Consider how we might diversify the methods used to gather student perspectives, moving beyond a reliance on NSS, MEQs, and traditional consultation mechanisms. Alternative approaches, including targeted focus groups, course-based discussions, student partnership projects, and outreach to underrepresented groups, could be used to ensure that curriculum decisions are informed by a broader range of student experiences. Particular attention should be paid to engaging the "silent majority" and those students who are less likely to participate in formal feedback processes.

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Embed student voice through the curriculum lifecycle	Explore how student voice should be incorporated at multiple stages of curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and review rather than being concentrated at isolated points during revalidation. Establish continuous feedback loops to enable students to see how their contributions influence decision-making and strengthen confidence in institutional engagement processes.
Strengthen cross-institutional and cross-departmental collaboration	Explore how to support curriculum transformation through structured opportunities for collaboration between academic staff, professional services, students, employers, and external stakeholders. Institutions should create spaces where different perspectives can inform curriculum discussions, helping to ensure that curriculum design is genuinely collaborative rather than siloed within individual programmes or departments.
Provide tailored support for staff leading curriculum change	Investigate how to professional development should move beyond generic training provision towards tailored support that reflects the realities of curriculum transformation. This may include mentoring, peer-support networks, leadership development, and discipline-specific opportunities that build staff confidence and capability in managing curriculum change.
Develop practical resources to support application of the pillars	Develop accompanying guidance, case studies, reflective prompts, and self-evaluation tools to support adaption of the framework and help curriculum teams translate the principles of the framework into practical actions and encourage more consistent application across the sector.
Further test and refine the pillars across different contexts	Explore how the framework operates across different disciplines, institutional types, and curriculum initiatives. Applying the pillars in diverse settings could help identify areas requiring refinement, strengthen the framework's applicability, and contribute to the development of a sector-informed evidence base for evaluating curriculum transformation.
Continue building a community of practice around curriculum design	Build on the ongoing collaboration established through the QAA project and the SEDA network to widen the community of practice focused on curriculum transformation. Sharing examples of practice, challenges, and lessons learned will support continuous enhancement and contribute to a stronger evidence base around the impact of curriculum design in higher education.

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Case Study 2: University of Brighton

Case Study 2: Application of the Pillars of Impact Framework: Research exploring effective course team collaborative practices for curriculum design

Lucy Chilvers, Juliet Eve, Dr Sierra Smucker

Our Curriculum Design Challenge

The Learning and Teaching Hub (LTHub) have been leading the Co:Lab Curriculum Design Process at the University of Brighton for the past 5 academic years. Over 150 course and module teams and module teams have been supported through a combination of planning meetings, curriculum design workshops, digital collaborative spaces and documents, and a resource toolkit. The process consists of facilitation by Academic Developers, contributions from experts in pedagogy and learning technologies and co-creation of new curricula involving stakeholders from the student body and external industry partners.

Evaluation approaches included consideration of a potential Theory of Change model which would require a longitudinal research design. With shorter impact evidence needed for strategic reporting, the Pillars of Impact Framework has enabled the team to conduct a focused evaluation into the impact of Co:Lab on course teams' collaborative working. This theme emerged in initial evaluations, and reflections from the Co:Lab workshop facilitators identified considerable variation amongst course teams regarding cohesion, communication and frequency of meetings. With the increasing importance of Academic Development being aligned to KPIs, the correlation with effective collaboration and NSS outcomes was also explored in the project.

Our Case Study aimed to answer the following research questions:
RQ1. Is there a relationship between course team culture and NSS outcomes?
RQ2. What makes a high-quality collaborative course team culture?
RQ3. What are the components for successful course team curriculum design?
RQ4. How does the Co:Lab process impact course teams in developing this collaborative culture and curriculum design?

Our Research Approach

The case study applied the 'collaborative working' pillar, specifically exploring how collaborative working between course teams, departments and stakeholders at the University of Brighton impacted course design. A mixed methods survey was sent out to academic staff (n=26) containing

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a combination of quantitative questions with Likert scales to rate how frequently their team engage in a variety of collaborative practices. Participants were also asked how important they perceived each of these collaborative practices to be. Qualitative survey questions were designed to explore staffs' perceptions of their course team culture, ways of overcoming challenges and their experiences of Co:Lab workshops.

Building on survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted on MS Teams with course leaders who had completed the survey (n=6). Interviews expanded upon survey findings with questions designed using the key themes and prompts from the Pillars of Impact Framework 'collaborative working' pillar.

Qualitative survey data and interview transcripts were thematically analysed (Braun and Clark, 2006) with data coded, and then codes brought together by identifying overarching themes informed by topics from the research questions and Pillars of Impact Framework. Quantitative survey data from course team representatives were converted to a four-point numeric scale (Never = 1 to Very regularly = 4), with "Not relevant" responses treated as missing data and excluded from analyses. Mean scores were calculated for levels of importance course leaders gave to the practice of different pillars, and how often they practiced them. Statistical analyses were used to calculate the gap between importance and practice. Courses were then grouped into low, medium, and high practice categories using tertiles of the practice mean scores. Finally, Pearson correlation analyses were conducted for the 17 courses with complete National Student Survey (NSS) data to explore relationships between collaborative practices, importance ratings, gap scores, and NSS outcomes (Learning Opportunities, Academic Support, Organisation and Management, and overall score).

Findings

RQ1) Courses with higher levels of collaborative practice demonstrate stronger NSS outcomes, particularly in Organisation and Management and overall score. Responses from 25 course team leaders indicated that collaborative practices were generally implemented regularly across course teams, with the strongest performance observed in communication, leadership, and role clarity. However, the largest gaps between perceived importance and actual practice were found in student partnership, peer support, course team social interaction, and opportunities for dialogue, suggesting these aspects of collaboration are valued by staff but remain challenging to enact consistently despite being widely recognised as important.

Analysis of the 17 courses with available NSS data found that higher levels of collaborative practice were generally associated with higher student satisfaction scores, while greater perceived importance of collaborative practices alone was not associated with better student outcomes. The strongest relationships were observed between collaborative practice and NSS Organisation and Management scores as well as overall score, particularly for peer support, role clarity, opportunities

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for dialogue, and student partnership. In addition, larger gaps between the perceived importance and implementation of collaborative practices were associated with lower NSS scores, suggesting that student experience may be strongest where course teams are able to translate valued collaborative approaches into everyday practice. This finding could also suggest that course teams that struggle to implement practices understand the potential impact on student experience and consequently rate the pillars as more important than other course leaders.

RQ 2) High-quality course team culture was distinguished by a variety of factors perceived by staff to be important. These included values of trust and mutual respect, and appreciating each other's different expertise and contributions to the curriculum design process:
We all do very different disciplinary things. So I think it's not that territorial... So we've all got a kind of mutual respect for how each other's work.

Self-awareness of one's own conduct in meetings and appreciation of each other's feelings was highlighted:
I think we're all conscious of making things feel like a safe space. I think some members of staff culturally aren't very comfortable...we need to be conscious of not dominating the conversation.

Course teams who have been collaborating over time described a legacy culture that new members join:
There's a legacy of, you know, I'm going to say more than a decade of being collaborative. So even when we have new members of the team joining, they fit into the system that's already there.

A democratic process, ensuring people feel included and able to contribute even if they miss curriculum design meetings was also identified:
The democratic approach is often raised whenever staff feel a sense (often just a perception) of being excluded from decision making. There is a lot of dialogue and discussion concerning the course, planning and future development, but here again, workloads mean that often meetings have poor attendance due to other pressures. This can feed a sense of not being involved in the development of the course.

RQ3) There were a variety of components to successful course team collaboration including team members having a course wide perspective and collaborative attitude towards individual work on module leadership and teaching:
Sometimes I do believe that module leaders view the course as a module and it isn't a module, it's a course.....to see your module sits before and after another module. There should be kind of seamless link.

A variety of technologies and shared documents are used by participants enabling collaborative working, but risks of others damaging files was a concern, and others discussed levels of staff confidence in using digital technologies being key to efficiency:

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I think as we're becoming more confident in shared documents. Confident that other people aren't going to screw it all up when they come on their shared document. Because these are really big working documents.

The role of LTHub colleagues' facilitation was highly valued for engaging staff and stakeholders in dialogue, framing a democratic space and enabling productivity:
I think that having something facilitated commits people to being there and taking part and also means that something is likely to happen as a result.
Finally, a lack of time to meet on campus was a common barrier raised, but also the timing during the academic year identified as important for planning when to collaborate:
End of the academic year is always a moment where everyone is at the same time just spitting out all sorts of ideas for next year ...everybody's kind of almost nervous with all this sort of energy.

RQ4) Participants noted that the Co:Lab process brought staff and stakeholders together in person and online, sparking positive and focused discussions, weaving in pedagogic expertise and facilitation, providing staff CPD in curriculum design practices, building confidence, and encouraging innovative thinking.
The meeting was useful to develop a sense of working together and to give new members of the team an idea of the culture and history of the programme.... Co:lab sparked ideas, initiating curriculum design work.
X is a new course so we have thus far enabled collaborative practices in curriculum design using the Colab process which was rigorous and strongly informed the successful validation of the course.
It has highlighted the benefits and importance of involving students for other colleagues in the course team. It was only done for one module... it has been very effective for the module team to inform curriculum design concepts and actions, as well as validate previous decisions made.

Application of the Pillars

The Collaborative Working Pillar enabled a clear focus to the research project, and the Framework's themes and prompt questions were a useful tool for designing the survey and interview questions, as well as guiding thematic data analysis. Key themes from the pillar included prompts to explore practices that enable sustainable partnerships and cross departmental working such as: infrastructure, roles and responsibilities; ways of engaging stakeholders including digital technologies; and approaches for developing safe spaces for dialogue and co-creation such as building trust, respect and collective ownership of curriculum design. Using the Pillars of Impact Framework has enabled a shorter-term impact evaluation of the work of the LTHub who facilitate the Co:Lab process and also enabled the positive correlation between effective course team collaboration and NSS outcomes data to be surfaced.

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Future Plans: Developing the Application of the Pillars

The Pillars of Impact Framework provides a structured approach to impact evaluation as well as guidance for introducing new or revised curriculum design processes. The University of Brighton is implementing a new Curriculum of the Future Framework, and all 6 pillars of the framework will be a useful lens for developing curriculum design process to ensure staff receive the best support, resourcing and infrastructure to enhance their work.

The collaborative working pillar has illuminated key practices that will be disseminated widely through Brighton's Course Leader Forum, Talking About Teaching podcast and webinars, and modelled through the support provided by the LTHub. Other pillars of the Framework could be used to direct the evaluation of Curriculum of the Future implementation and staff support processes.

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Case Study 3: The University of Edinburgh

Case Study 3: Reflecting about Challenge Courses at The University of Edinburgh: How might the Pillars Framework enhance the design and evaluation of sustainable curriculum reform?

Dr Celeste McLauglin Professor Mary Brennan

Our Curriculum Design Challenge

This case study contribution from The University of Edinburgh (UoE) focusses on Challenge Courses. They were conceived as part of a strategic curriculum change initiative that evolved to accommodate the changing priorities of the UoE. The University recognises that these innovative courses will help meet the aims of the UoE Learning and Teaching Strategy[1] and is continuing to support Challenge Courses exploring a business-as-usual model for them going forward. Initially 8 courses were piloted and there are currently 11 available to students with proposals for further Challenge Courses welcomed.

Challenge Courses are interdisciplinary undergraduate courses offered to 1st and 2nd year pre-honours students[2] They are designed around different societal challenges and/or social issues/debates, involving contributions from across multiple disciplines and, where appropriate, external partners. They are intended to provide students with an opportunity to learn about, and develop their skills, to consider from different disciplinary perspectives, interests, and contexts, globally significant topics. We believe that UoE Challenge Courses provide the basis for a valuable case study given their innovative, interdisciplinary nature and how through an ongoing programme of strategic institution led curriculum reform they are contributing to novel forms of interdisciplinary education at the UoE.

We invited those involved in designing and teaching different Challenge Courses as well as a senior strategic leader to contribute to this case study helping us understand if the Pillars Framework aligned with their experience of innovative course design.

1 The University of Edinburgh Learning and Teaching Strategy: https://strategy-2030.ed.ac.uk/strategy-in-action/university-strategies/learning-and-teaching-strategy.

2 Courses undertaken in Year 1 and 2 do not count towards UG degree classification under the University of Edinburgh degree regulations.

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Our research approach

The Pillars Framework has the potential to unpack the complex processes involved in curriculum development providing institutions with a pedagogically grounded approach to addressing strategic priorities that involve contributions from multiple stakeholders.

By interviewing those involved in designing Challenge Courses, we reflected on aspects of the framework including:

- How the framework might help with designing Challenge Courses.
- How the framework might inform future iterations of Challenge Courses.
- How the framework might help evidence the value of curriculum design and enhancement practice across diverse stakeholder groups.

We conducted one focus group with Challenge Course leads, plus a semi-structured interview with the Challenge Course strategic lead for the UoE. The interview provided context to help explore and understand how the Pillars Framework aligned with existing curriculum development processes for Challenge Courses.

We hoped the focus group would comprise of a mix of stakeholders involved in developing a Challenge Courses to test the framework holistically. We approached 8 Challenge Course leads (course organisers) and invited them to participate. We also asked them to share the invitation with others involved in developing their Challenge Course.

The response to the invite was smaller than we hoped and our initial focus group comprised of 4 participants. Unfortunately, we had some last-minute cancellations and decided to go ahead with the scheduled focus group which comprised of 2 participants.

Findings

- Participants agreed that the Pillars were appropriate and aligned with their experience of designing Challenge Courses. Whilst the prompt questions were considered appropriate, they raised concerns about who is being asked those questions and who is in a position to answer them.
- Challenge Courses were part of a strategic curriculum transformation project which had resource and evaluation embedded in the process. There was recognition that this is also needed within the as normal business of curriculum design and enhancement and not just through strategic initiatives.
- The framework will help encourage the evaluation of curriculum design in a purposeful way.
- Developing Challenge Courses resulted in innovations in course design. Being involved in designing and/or teaching Challenge Courses involved collaboration, experimentation,

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navigating, and negotiating, new ways of working and was a learning process for all involved.

- Discussing the framework prompted reflections about the design of Challenge Courses including on future course activities and plans, encouraging participants to delve deeper into the curriculum design process.

- Reflecting on the Pillars Framework helped participants move beyond just focusing on content.

Application of the Pillars

There was agreement from participants that the Pillars were appropriate and resonated with their experience of developing Challenge Courses. Further insights and reflections about the specific Pillars discussed are shared here.

The Student Voice & Engagement Pillar

- The Student Voice Pillar was difficult to achieve and was identified as the least successful Pillar. Getting representative feedback (from students) is a challenge.

- The Student Voice Pillar prompted discussion about participation and engagement, as well as reflections about whose voice is heard. This prompted participants to consider ways of seeking the perspectives of those who are not being heard.

- Offering a range of interactions including asynchronous and synchronous activities will help surface student voice in future iterations of Challenge Courses.

- Student Voice could also be surfaced during collaborations with students and examples included building agency into the course design process and working collaboratively with students to share practice.

- There are multiple ways of capturing student voice including course evaluations and course activities.

- There were opportunities to identify Student Voice during teaching by listening to students during informal conversations as well as more formal feedback processes. The student assessments also provided rich insights into the student experience.

- Student Voice could also be surfaced during collaborations with students and examples included building agency into the course design process and working collaboratively with students to share practice.

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The Collaborative Working Pillar

- Whilst the institutional infrastructure was a clear barrier to this kind of innovative curriculum design work, and temporary workarounds were found, ways of sustaining collaborative partnerships remain a barrier.
- The importance of everyone having a voice during the course design process was acknowledged.
- Collaborative working was challenging because of the diverse course team who had different disciplinary backgrounds and were at different stages in their careers.
- The importance of attempting to ensure there were genuine partnerships where safe collaborative physical and digital spaces were created was highlighted.
- A sense of community developed during the collaborative design of Challenge Courses and this is a good place for sharing ideas about the future iterations of the course.
- A Community of Practice was developed to create a space for collaborative working with colleagues from different disciplinary backgrounds
-

The Strategic Alignment Pillar

- This Pillar aligned with the approval processes that exist for Challenge Courses and that strategic alignment needs to exist with wider institutional themes. There needs to be a sustainable way to do this to ensure adaptation can take place if institutional priorities shift and to stop doing things that no longer align with these priorities.
- This Pillar prompted reflections about the need to include the University community in strategic alignment discussions.
- The discussions about strategic alignment encouraged connections and awareness that were previously less visible to some participants.

The Curriculum Enhancement Pillar

- This Pillar prompted reflections about who is asking the questions and where is the best place to have this discussion.
- Discussing aspects of this Pillar may lead to some heated debates.
- The inclusive aspect of the framework and the emphasis on all learners was viewed positively.

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Future Plans: Developing the Application of the Pillars

We will share the Case Study with Challenge Course leads and the community of practice that has been developed to continue to explore how the Pillars Framework can inform the design of Challenge Courses. The findings will also be integrated into the ongoing institutional curricula reform project and shared with the wider university through blogposts and workshops to prompt purposeful curriculum design and evaluation of the curriculum design process.

Case Study contributors

Thanks to all Challenge Course developers who contributed to this case study. The University of Edinburgh project team comprised of Dr Celeste McLaughlin and Professor Mary Brennan. Thanks also to Dr Ian Glen who contributed to the earlier stages of the project.

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Case Study 4: University of Staffordshire

Case Study 4: Validating the Curriculum Design and Review: Pillars of Impact Framework at module leadership level

Nina Cupric, Educational Developer, University of Staffordshire

Our Curriculum Design Challenge

In 2025, the University of Staffordshire began the design and roll out of a new Curriculum Framework that aimed to transform the curriculum at the university. It intended to transfer all programmes at the university from a 20/40 credit structure to a 30/60 structure, as a response to the government's Life Long Learning plans. At the time of writing this case study, the majority of our undergraduate provision had undergone re-design, with most courses set to launch in September 2027.

Our Research Approach

Through the implementation process of Curriculum Framework and the separate, yet connected development of the Pillars of Impact Framework, we became very interested in understanding the role of the module leader in the process of curriculum development and re-development. Module leaders are ultimately the ones who deliver the re-designed content and are on the front lines of student feedback and interaction. The choice was made to focus our Stage 2 research on them, using the framework to reflect on and evaluate their involvement in the re-design of new modules. The scope of this research is confined to examining how the Curriculum Framework has been integrated into the course and module re-design process, rather than evaluating the effectiveness of the resulting re-designed provision. This is because, at the time of the study, none of the re-designed modules had yet commenced delivery.

The aims of the project are therefore twofold:

1. Section 1: Validating the value of the Pillars of Impact Framework as a tool that module leaders can use to reflect on and evaluate any changes they make to their module curriculum.

2. Section 2: Gathering information that can be used as part of a broader evaluation of the Curriculum Framework roll out.

Our research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. As a module leader, what opportunities do you have to reflect on their practice?

2. What do you think of the framework as a tool for evaluation at module level?

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3. Would you use the framework again as a way to structure evaluation and reflection?

4. Has using the tool changed the way you will approach course design/re-design in the future?

Participants were invited to use the framework and subsequently fill out two Padlets with their thoughts and answers. The results were then processed using thematic analysis, as described in Brown and Clarke (2022).
Participation with the research was lower than anticipated (n=4) due to competing pressures on academic staff time. While initially disappointing this illustrated the finding that staff felt they didn't have sufficient time to engage in activities outside of direct teaching or module leadership.

Findings

As a module leader, what opportunities do they have to reflect on your practice?

Staff reported that they felt rushed and under-prepared for curriculum design, lacking resources and time to meaningfully engage and then reflect on their experiences. The need for more support from central curriculum development teams to embed the pillars meaningfully was highlighted.

What do you think of the Pillars of Impact framework as a tool for evaluation at module level?

The participants did identify the Pillars of Impact Framework (henceforth referred to as the PoI Framework) as a valuable, structured lens for reflection in particular. The use of the lens however differed between participants, with one seeing it as highly usable and progressive for module design and another seeing it as mainly a course-level, high-level checklist rather than a practical module evaluation tool.

All participants however agreed that it prompted more thorough, justified curriculum decisions. One noted the POI framework lent more on reflection rather than on the "traditional" English Higher Education quantitative success metrics such as the National Student Survey (NSS); continuation, completion and progression metrics and Graduate Outcomes which they hadn't expected.

Would they use the PoI framework again as a way to structure evaluation and reflection?

All participants agreed that they would use the framework again as way to structure their reflection, noting that their practice to date had been more informal and self-initiated, and often only engaged with when something went wrong. Again, it was highlighted that this wasn't due to lack of willingness on their behalf, but a side effect of having to handle competing pressures, such as research, recruitment and outreach, as well as upskilling in their subject area. One participant noted that as a newer academic it was a good reminder that during curriculum development, there

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is more to think about than just the content that is being taught. They noted that in the future it will help them formulate the necessary questions to support their reflection.

Using the PoI framework was seen as a good addition to the traditional quantitative success metrics, and as a good way to prepare for external examiner and department meetings, as the questions prompted deeper and more structured reflection that participants felt enhanced their ability to explain their impact. It allowed them to structure a narrative around the traditional quantitative success metrics and explain the impact of past design decisions.

One participant was keen to see it used as part of a team or department away day to structure a group reflection activity on the recent implemented changes to their curriculum.

Has using the tool changed the way they will approach course design/re-design in the future?
Participants noted that a key weakness of the Curriculum Framework implementation that they noted through using the PoI Framework was the use of student voice. While there was reflection on some strong practice at module level (surveys, interactive tools, decolonising initiatives) it was highlighted that there were little to no direct student involvement in major structural changes. By using the tool, they hope to continue strengthening this at a module level, while also advocating for stronger student voice in large scale redevelopments.

One participant has gone on to request specific course design training from Educational Development to enhance their knowledge of both the process at the university but also course design in general.

Application of the Pillars

Due to the nature of the research, it encompassed all pillars of the PoI Framework. Participants however showed a clear preference to different pillars, particularly student voice and engagement. One participant chose to engage with all pillars, which has provided the project team with specific feedback to be actioned. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that they didn't feel that the "Collaborative working" pillar felt relevant to them at all as they only worked within a small group of staff.

Future Plans: Developing the Application of the Pillars

The research conducted as part of Stage 2 of the project has provided an invaluable first step in the development of the evaluation strategy for the Curriculum Framework. We plan to combine the reflective elements of the PoI Framework with more traditional evaluative data to give us a holistic picture of the rollout from both academic and professional services staff. We also plan to more explicitly engage with students in the evaluation process, using the PoI framework to facilitate this.

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Additionally, from the perspective of Educational Development, it has highlighted that there is more work to be done to support staff before the course design process begins. As noted by McKenney et al. (2015), many educators don't have knowledge of design processes and up-to-date pedagogies. Once again, the PoI Framework will provide useful framing to support the development of this training.

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Case Study 5: University of Warwick

Case Study 5: Senior Leaders' Perspectives on the Pillars of Impact Curriculum Framework: A Pre-Implementation Evaluation

Professor Letizia Gramaglia Jessica Humphreys

Our Curriculum Design Challenge

This case study is based on a pre-implementation evaluation of the Pillars of Impact Curriculum Design, Review and Evaluation Framework at a large research-intensive institution seeking greater coherence across curriculum design and delivery, and stronger support for curriculum leadership at programme, department and institutional level.

Our Research Approach

The evaluation was conducted using a utilisation-focused evaluation (UFE) approach (Patton, 2008), which prioritises the perspectives of intended users.

Four dimensions were assessed:

- **Utility**: whether senior leaders and stakeholders in one institution perceive the framework as useful for curriculum planning and decision-making.
- **Feasibility**: can the framework realistically be applied within existing processes and resources.
- **Appropriateness**: does the framework fit their specific context, roles, and needs.
- **Acceptability**: do stakeholders value the framework and its contribution to strategic alignment?

The evaluation was designed to capture the perspectives of senior education stakeholders drawn from three groups:

- Senior education leaders with strategic responsibility for curriculum quality and enhancement;
- Directors of Undergraduate/Graduate Studies (DUG/DGS members) with programme-level curriculum oversight;
- WIHEA Fellows (experienced practitioners with an active interest in pedagogical innovation and educational development).

Participants were invited to review the Framework before completing the survey, focusing on two pillars as the primary lenses: Wider Context (connecting to external drivers and contexts) and Strategic Alignment (ensuring coherence with institutional goals).

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Data were collected through a mixed-methods online survey incorporating:

- Quantitative: Likert-scale items (1–5: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, or equivalent) mapped across the four UFE evaluation dimensions (Utility, Feasibility, Appropriateness, and Acceptability) producing numerical scores for each dimension and individual item.
- Qualitative: Open-ended questions inviting respondents to describe what they found most valuable, what additional elements were needed, what barriers might prevent use, what support or resources would help, how well the framework fitted their role, and their overall impressions.

Six valid responses were received, from respondents with between five and over twenty years of curriculum development or leadership experience, all active in curriculum review activities within the previous three years. Roles represented included senior institutional leader in the Education portfolio, Director of Studies/ Education, and departmental leadership roles.

Qualitative responses were analysed using framework analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), with the four UFE dimensions as organising categories, and triangulated across data sources to identify convergence, divergence, and variation across stakeholder groups.

Methodological note

n=6 valid responses were received (one further test response was excluded). At this sample size, quantitative findings are indicative and exploratory rather than statistically generalisable, consistent with UFE methodology, which prioritises depth of intended-user perspective over sample size at the pre-implementation stage.

Findings

The table below presents mean scores across the four evaluation dimensions. Scores are drawn from all six respondents where data were available (n=5 for Acceptability, as one respondent did not complete this section).

Dimension	Mean	Min	Max	n	Stakeholder perception
Utility	**3.94**	2.33	5.00	6	*Cautiously positive; framework valued for shifting focus from compliance to impact*
Feasibility	**3.28**	1.33	4.00	6	*Neutral; time and workload are*

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					consistent barriers across all roles
Appropriateness	**3.75**	1.00	5.00	6	*Broadly positive; strongest fit for strategic education roles*
Acceptability	**4.20**	3.33	5.00	5	*Positive; willingness to use and recommend was high (n=5**)*

*** One respondent did not complete the Acceptability section; mean is based on n=5.*

Across all four dimensions, the pattern is one of cautious to confident positivity, with Acceptability (4.20) and Utility (3.94) as the strongest signals, and Feasibility (3.28) as the area of greatest concern, consistent across both quantitative scores and qualitative responses.

Utility: Is the Framework useful?
Mean score: 3.94/5
Respondents broadly affirmed the framework's value, particularly the way it shifts curriculum conversations from procedural compliance towards educational purpose. The explicit connection between curriculum design, review, and evaluation of impact was highlighted by multiple respondents as the most distinctive and valuable feature.

"A framework that foregrounds impact helps shift the conversation towards what curriculum change is intended to achieve for students, how that change will be recognised, and what evidence would demonstrate improvement."

The six-pillar structure was valued as a practical thinking tool, and its emphasis on student voice, collaborative working, and the recognition of the "hidden work" in curriculum development was resonant.

Feasibility: Can it be used in practice?
Mean score: 3.28 / 5 (lowest dimension)
Time pressure was cited by every respondent as the primary barrier to implementation. The risk of "getting the job done" at the expense of meaningful collaboration and reflection was widely recognised:

"The focus is often on 'getting the job done' which can mean rushing through the important collaboration and connection with students and other stakeholders."

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Institutional cultures that reward rapid, visible responses to student feedback or NSS outcomes may work against the slower, more diagnostic process the framework encourages and lead to superficial engagement.

Respondents were nonetheless optimistic about what would help: workshops, templates, and facilitation support for course team dialogue were the most frequently requested.

Appropriateness: Does it fit the context?
Mean score: 3.75/5
This dimension showed the widest range of individual scores. Respondents in senior strategic education roles found the framework gave shared language for connecting programme decisions to institutional priorities, while those closer to course-level delivery questioned its fit with accreditation requirements, technical sequencing or distinct epistemological traditions, calling for discipline-sensitive examples and explicit guidance on adaptation.

"The institutional alignment aspects of the framework spoke to me really strongly. Without 'joined up' practice, we will spend more time trying to navigate/de-silo/avoid competition intra-institutionally."

Acceptability: Do stakeholders value it?
Mean score: 4.20/5 (highest dimension, n=5)
Among respondents who completed the Acceptability items, the framework received its strongest scores. Willingness to use, recommend and see added value in the framework was consistently high, even among respondents who identified significant barriers in the Feasibility dimension. Acceptability was, however, explicitly framed as conditional on the framework becoming more practical, discipline sensitive and concrete implementation tools.

"I think it's insightful, grounded and well-oriented to what is needed 'on the ground'. My only reservations are about the pragmatics of embedding it in practice."

Cross-cutting Themes
Across all four dimensions, several themes emerged consistently from the qualitative data:

- Student voice and co-creation were seen as foundational – the feature most consistently cited as a strength.
- Cross-institutional learning was raised unprompted by several respondents, keen to share practice and avoid reinventing solutions.
- Concrete, realistic case studies, not idealised examples, were the single most widely requested resource.

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- Lasting change depends on teaching being genuinely valued institutionally: in workload recognition, career progression, and leadership behaviour.

Application of the Pillars

Respondents also reflected on how the Wider Context and Strategic Alignment pillars might structure curriculum conversations in practice.

Pillar	How it could be used
Wider Context Connecting to external drivers and contexts	Audit programme content, assessments and outcomes against drivers such as AI and digital education, sustainability, accreditation and equity, benchmarked against sector and professional body guidance.
Strategic Alignment Ensuring coherence with institutional goals	Check that programme decisions, assessment patterns and outcome data are explicitly linked to institutional strategy, via an annual self-evaluation prompt sheet reviewed at departmental level.

Beyond supporting curriculum design and review conversations, both pillars offer a structured framework for evaluating the quality and coherence of curriculum practice over time. Further suggestions included: mapping existing evidence against each pillar's questions to surface gaps; facilitated peer review across programme teams to enable horizontal learning; and strategic discussions linking curriculum decisions to institutional priorities.

Challenges, Barriers and Constraints

Challenges surfaced were structural and cultural. Time was the constraint cited by every respondent:

"A key barrier is always time in curriculum development, particularly where building consensus is a priority, and also ensuring that the focus remains on the quality of discussion first, recognising that there will always be some form of form filling, paper-based exercise to capture the outcomes of the work."

Beyond time, institutional pressure to move quickly from problem to solution works against the reflective process the framework encourages, compounded by review workload falling on a small number of education-focused colleagues without recognition.

A further challenge concerns accessibility. One respondent with extensive course-level experience expressed concern that the framework's language and framing risk being perceived as top-down and overly sophisticated creating distance between the framework's intent and the academic colleagues it ultimately needs to reach.

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Future Plans: Developing the Application of the Pillars

The findings from this evaluation provide a basis for the next phase of framework development, pointing to five priorities:

Development priority	Detail
Discipline-sensitive resources	Worked examples and case studies across contrasting contexts (STEM, professional, creative arts, humanities, interdisciplinary), the single most requested resource overall.
Tiered implementation templates	Three levels of engagement: light-touch annual reflection, periodic review, and full redesign - so departments can engage proportionately.
Facilitation and workshop materials	Facilitator guides, stakeholder mapping tools, and structured workshop formats for group settings.
Cross-institutional learning	Explore collaboration across institutions facing similar sector challenges or subject benchmarks.
Broader consultation	Extend evaluation to course-level academic staff and students whose voices are not yet represented.

References

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Summary and Future Developments

This framework can be used by a wide range of stakeholders for a diverse range of curriculum design, development and evaluation tasks. The pillars and prompts intentionally integrates the design process with the evaluation of that process so that evaluation is not seen as an afterthought. You can use all of the pillars of the framework or select the ones that are most relevant to you. The prompts provide a menu for you to select which questions might be helpful to guide the curriculum task at hand. The case studies illustrate various applications of the framework in different universities to a wide range of curriculum development projects.

We would like to thank colleagues from various sector networks for providing really helpful feedback on the initial draft design which we have tried out best to incorporate here. However, we recognise the dynamic nature of the curriculum space and so we are keen to keep this framework current, meaningful and useful (and will be considering how to make the document a dynamic resource). The framework will be available on the QAA website as a downloadable link as well as on the SEDA Curriculum Development Network's LinkedIn page - .(1) SEDA Curriculum Development Network | Groups | LinkedIn page. And if for any reason you can't access this in either of these links then please do email Dr Hilary Wason @ CurriculumDesignFutures@kingston.ac.uk.

We would love you to try out the framework yourself, and contribute to a Compendium of Good Practice over time. We will revisit aspects of the framework periodically and are keen invite interested colleagues to a framework review panel. If you are interested in trying out the framework, writing up a case study and/or being part of the framework review panel please provide some more details on Microsoft form here.

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