



Newcastle University's Leading Edge Curriculum

Interview with Rachel Dearlove and Sara Marsham, Newcastle University

Thursday 28th May 2026.

The following questions and answers are drawn from an interview with colleagues from Newcastle University. The interview was conducted and written up by **Rose Blackburn**, Collaborative Enhancement Project Assistant and undergraduate at the University of Exeter. It forms part of a Collaborative Enhancement Project toolkit on Curriculum Reform, funded by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

In the interview, Rose asked questions about how Newcastle encouraged programme teams to embrace AI literacy within the skills and attributes associated with their [*Leading Edge Curriculum*](#). Sara and Rachel explained how the change programme developed from designing and delivering pilot programmes to 'unpacking' outcomes and discoveries from the pilots. They discussed the expected outcomes and conclude with some advice for other colleagues taking part in transformations in Higher Education.

Question	Response
What were the aims of, or background to, this project?	<u>On the Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC) Framework:</u> The LEC Framework was created following experiences with Newcastle's last 'teaching excellence framework' submission. The submission highlighted many excellent practises but also that the university had no overarching narrative on education across academic units/courses The Leading Edge Curriculum framework creates a set of principles across eight programme elements that are applicable across the university. Alongside the LEC framework, Newcastle developed the Education for Life Skills and Attributes – these are 15 skills and attributes that will be embedded within curricula.

	Students may also develop skills and attributes outside of the curriculum, and it was important to support this development through the framework too (linking to Newcastle's 'Beyond the curriculum objective'). <u>On Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the curriculum:</u> AI is a key topic in many institutions - how to support students to refine their usage or how to consider both ethical and moral responsibilities around its use. A few years back, Newcastle made the decision to encourage AI usage and produce training resources for students on it. Concerns were raised on rising AI usage, leading to further talks on ensuring continued degree validity and a just student experience. This raised the opportunity to rethink assessments, balancing the push for in-person examinations for assessment security with access needs development opportunities. The LEC framework allows AI usage to be woven into the university's course design, reducing the need for redesigns as AI evolves.
How were a range of views and opinions considered through the project (i.e.: ways you gathered people together or engaged stakeholders)?	<u>Discovery:</u> LEC framework workstreams were led by senior colleagues and an open call was made for colleagues in the institution to engage with area/s that interested them. Project groups, involving 100+ colleagues, were formed to consider programme structures, assessment principles, effective practise, inclusivity and many other areas. Students were involved through the 'Insights Panel' and focus groups. <u>After the framework was drafted:</u> Pre- Senate approval: Hour long feedback sessions were carried out in academic units (including leadership teams with at least one Director of Education per unit) plus in institution-wide webinars and town halls. Since Senate approval: Seven pilot programmes across the three Faculties have been through the design process to align them with the LEC framework. These pilots have already provided valuable feedback as to how programme design should occur and be implemented. This feedback allowed an evaluation of the ways that

	the programme teams could be supported to implement the LEC framework. Director of Education forums have also provided feedback (this was particularly insightful regarding developing approaches to capstone activities), as well as an open email address which fielded queries on the project from various sources. Efforts were made to provide consultation and feedback opportunities.
What was delivery like? How did you implement the changes?	Implementation is still in the early stages- the development plans have been approved and piloted, but the main stages have yet to come. <u>Pilot Programmes:</u> Focused on the formal curriculum design structure for collections of programmes, these pilots have recently begun to provide feedback. They were designed to allow programme teams to really consider how courses align with the LEC framework and the revised Qualification, Credit and Programme Design framework. <u>Unpacking the LEC:</u> The unpacking process looks at what is missing in terms of enabling policy and guidance for each of the eight elements of the LEC, such as better policy on assessing group work, to consider if there are any changes to be made. Changes to policies, guidance and case studies are expected to occur because of unpacking overtime. The above two stages are being delivered simultaneously, structured so that plans can be altered to ensure student experience is enhanced. Through 2027 & 2028, programme redesign of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes will build a longer-term resource base, which should provide the momentum for a longer-term cultural shift.
What impacts have you seen / do you expect to see?	Currently impacts are hard to conceptualise (changes are gradual and cumulative). <u>Expected Impacts:</u>

	Student Experience: By increasing shared terminology between degrees, perceptions of the differences between degree experiences should improve, leading to improvements in reported student experience. Accessibility and inclusive teaching: Mandatory planning of alternative assessments at design for all assessments should reduce last minute scrambles for alternative formats. Improved skills articulation and graduate outcomes for students, through implementing reflection scaffolding to consider skills. Reductions to colleague workloads, improvements to efficiency due to standardisation of admin and testing.
Were all the project aims met? Were any of your aims more challenging / a struggle to complete?	Overall achievements and challenges are uncertain at present as many stages of implementation are yet to be completed. <u>At present:</u> Some concerns regarding colleague acceptance were unfounded. Most colleagues were willing to adapt or in some cases completely change existing structures (e.g.: move away from block teaching) We have seen some challenge around the consistency of project implementation. Previous projects have been less committed to consistency, causing some tension in some areas.
Is there anything you would improve if you were to redo this project?	Consider student involvement and support! This may be challenging as current students will not necessarily see/ gain direct benefits. Improve the process for engaging with the heads of schools and school leadership teams. This would improve understanding and support within the faulty executive boards and get earlier input and feedback.
What were the highlights?	Seeing colleagues collaborate and share passions (e.g.: for literature) was enjoyable and often led to new insights.
More information:	https://www.ncl.ac.uk/epgs/leading-edge-curriculum/ https://www.ncl.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching/lec/