



Workshop Facilitation Guide

A Virtuous Circle for Curriculum Change

QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project

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About This Workshop

Context & Background

This workshop guide draws on activities developed as part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project: “Curriculum Reform: A Whole Community Approach.”

It was inspired by a keynote workshop by Cynthia Heiner, Education Consultant and Strategist at Freie Universität Berlin, delivered in March 2025.

Key goals: Identify how features of your institution support a virtuous circle of curriculum change; help people work across boundaries; spot gaps; clarify actions and next steps.

Who it is for: Staff and students. Adaptable for other stakeholders such as professional services colleagues and governors.





Practical Guide

Who, When & How “Understanding how the parts connect is what turns individual effort into lasting transformation.”

Session structure

Duration: 45–60 minutes (adaptable)
Total participants: up to 40
Group size: 4–6 per group
Open and close as one large group
Mapping activity in small groups

Session overview

Step 1: Introductions (10 min)
Step 2: The Four Features (10 min)
Step 3: Mapping (10 min)
Steps 4–5: Reflection & Gap-spotting (10 min each)
Step 6: Closing insights (10 min)

Flexibility & adaptations

Can be standalone or part of a series of planning and prototyping sessions.
Designed for staff and students, also works for other stakeholders.
Groups can work on the same project or different projects.
Mapping can be done on paper or with virtual tools (e.g. Padlet, Miro).

Intended outcomes

Participants leave with a ‘map’ showing how features of their institution link together in a virtuous circle.
Clarity on gaps and potential next steps to accelerate change.
Renewed momentum and ideas for communicating successes.



The Six Steps

A facilitated journey from
introductions to action

Step 1: Introducing the Session

10 minutes

Scope: Clarify the change project you want people to discuss. Groups can work on the same project, or each group can choose their own.

Groups: Introduce group members to each other. Suggested icebreaker questions:

- What is your link to this work?
- How would you describe this project in one word?

Facilitator note: This workshop works best with groups of 4–6. Open and close as one large group; smaller groups do the mapping activity. Sessions of up to 40 people work well.



Step 2: The Four Features of Culture Change

10 minutes

Every curriculum transformation needs four things:

- 1. Motivated People** – Who will drive the change? (e.g. Education Leaders, Programme Directors, Student Representatives, ‘keen’ staff members)
- 2. Enabling Cultures & Structures** – Which structures already support innovation? (e.g. governance committees, pilot-friendly departments, communities of practice)
- 3. Opportunities** – What motivates change? (e.g. NSS scores, AI, seedcorn funding, success stories, risks to student experience)
- 4. Knowledge & Expertise** – Who has relevant information? (e.g. Education Leaders, Instructional Designers, Students’ Union)





Step 3: Mapping the Institutional Links

10 minutes

Using the four-quadrant template, groups map the valuable features that exist at their institution:

- 1. Motivated People** – Name the individuals, roles, or teams who help drive the change.
- 2. Enabling Cultures & Structures** – Identify governance, departments, and communities that support innovation.
- 3. Opportunities** – List the drivers and incentives that motivate people to change.
- 4. Knowledge & Expertise** – Note who holds the knowledge and skills that inform the project.

Facilitator tip: Encourage groups to draw connecting arrows between quadrants to start building their 'virtuous circle' map.

Use the template on the next slide
Print it out or open in Padlet / Miro

Creating a Virtuous Circle: Mapping Template

MOTIVATED PEOPLE

Who drives and champions the change?

(e.g. leaders, project teams, student advocates)

ENABLING CULTURES & STRUCTURES

Which structures support innovation?

(e.g. governance, pilot departments, communities of practice)

OPPORTUNITIES

What motivates people to change?

(e.g. funding, NSS scores, success stories, student experience)

KNOWLEDGE & EXPERTISE

Who has the information to inform the project?

(e.g. education specialists, students' union, instructional designers)



Example from a Previous Workshop

University of Exeter, March 2025

A workshop based on the model on slide 8 was delivered by **Cynthia Heiner, Education Strategist**, as part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project event.

Participants worked in groups of 4–6 and produced paper-based quadrant maps within 10 minutes.

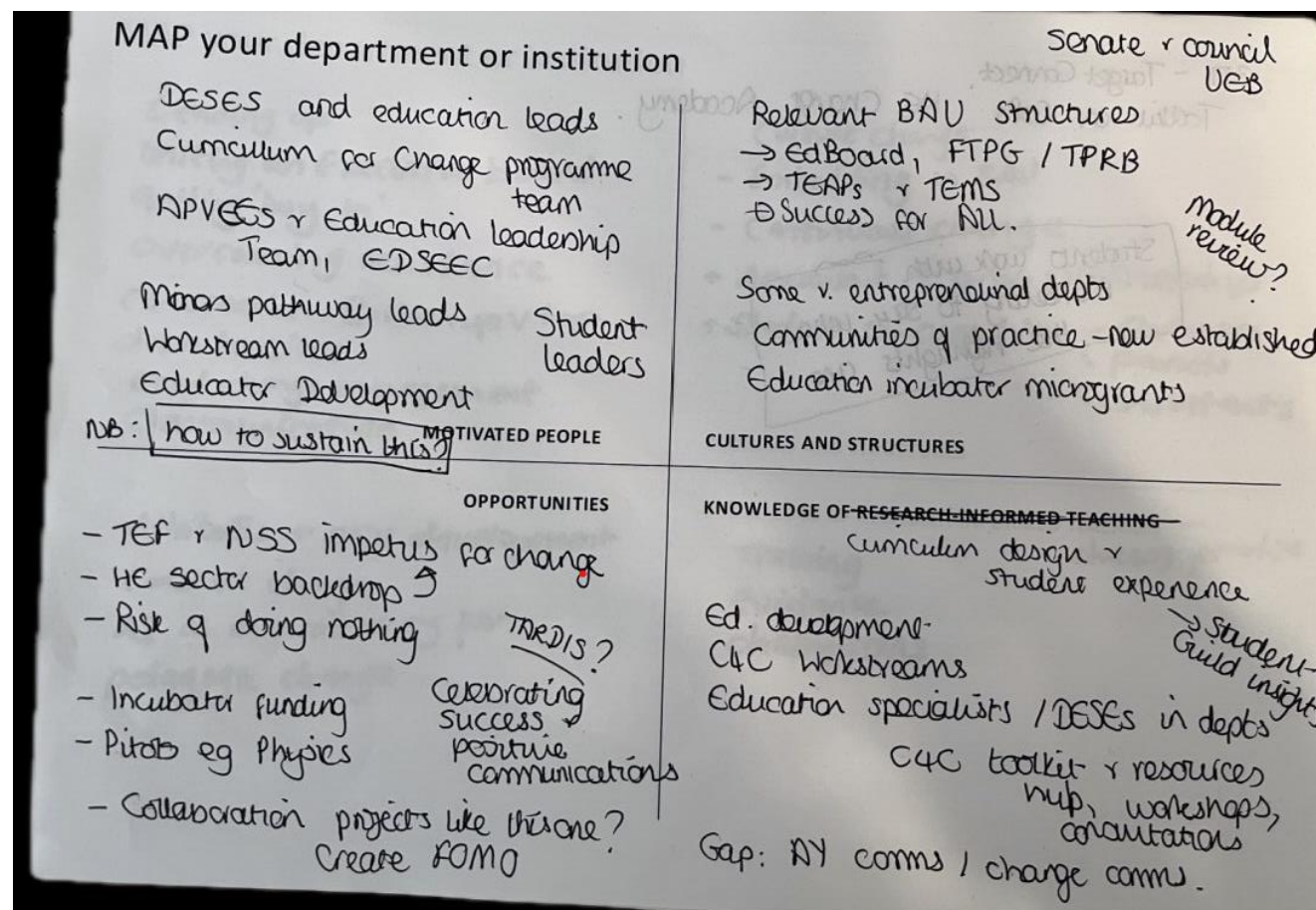
A key insight from the workshop:

Groups realised the importance of communicating successes and sharing evidence to help colleagues understand the rationale for change — this became a key action point.

The session demonstrated that even a short mapping activity can generate meaningful, shared understanding and concrete next steps.



Example map from a prior workshop, March 2025 — groups created paper-based maps in 10 minutes





Steps 4 & 5: Reflection & Gap-Spotting

10 minutes each

“Identifying what is missing is just as valuable as celebrating what already works.”

Step 4: Questions for reflection

- How do the characteristics of each quadrant link together in your institution or department?
- How are motivated people connected to institutional governance and supported by opportunities to innovate?
- How does knowledge and expertise feed into decision-making processes?
- How do pilot innovations become ‘business as usual’?

Through these links, a virtuous circle develops that supports and sustains transformation.

Step 5: Gap-spotting

Which part of the quadrant is least developed?

What mechanisms could you establish to help fill the gap?

How can you create links from the other three quadrants to ensure the virtuous circle continues?

Facilitator tip: Encourage groups to be specific about who could take ownership of gap-filling actions.

Step 6: Closing Insights

10 minutes

Bring the whole room together and invite groups to share their maps.

Discussion prompts:

- Any common themes across groups? Key differences?
- What action will each group take next?
- What else could you do to strengthen your curriculum change ‘virtuous circle’?

Facilitator note: 45–60 minutes is ideal. If time is short, trim the reflection steps — but allow enough time for meaningful mapping (at least 20 minutes for Steps 3–5). Outputs can be captured on paper or using a virtual tool such as Padlet or Miro.



References

Heiner, C. (2025) 'Where to Put Your Energy: Rethinking How We Approach Teaching and Curriculum Reform in Higher Education'. Keynote workshop, Symposium on Leading Institutional Curriculum Transformation, University of Exeter, March 14th.

Lau, A. C., Henderson, C., Stains, M., Dancy, M., Merino, C., Apkarian, N., Raker, J. R., & Johnson, E. (2024). Characteristics of departments with high-use of active learning in introductory STEM courses: Implications for departmental transformation. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 11(1), 10.

This workshop guide was developed as part of a QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project, 'Curriculum Reform: A Whole Community Approach'. For further information, visit qaa.ac.uk.

AI Disclaimer

The author used ChatGPT, an AI tool, to improve spelling and design to an original draft during the preparation of this presentation. After using this tool, the author carefully reviewed and edited the text and take(s) full responsibility for the final content. The content and insights are the author's own work.





Thank you

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