

# Space: a curriculum issue

1. The financial viability of an institution of higher education is based on:
  - 1.1 the provision of a flexible and cost effective estate capable of meeting the needs of students and their study programmes;
  - 1.2 the generation of student numbers able to support financially viable courses.
  - 1.3 The operation of research projects covering all their costs.
2. There are clear signs that universities and colleges appear to be failing to deliver relevant and financially viable courses.
  - 2.1 School leavers at 16 years old and with a single GCSE have an unemployment rate of 26%. University undergraduates aged 21 years have an almost identical unemployment rate of 25%. There are many who do not consider a rate of unemployment an appropriate measure of higher education but it is a belief that appears to be gaining credibility.
  - 2.2 The recruitment of overseas students is often emphasised by institutions. The position is complicated by the fact that colleges in such countries as Australia, Canada and the USA are in competition with UK institutions. France, Germany and the Netherlands are also providing degree courses in English for overseas students. Often visa regulations, work placements and post degree employment regulations in other countries are noticeably more generous than in the UK. In these circumstances the recruitment of overseas students is likely to be insufficient to resolve current financial problems.
  - 2.3 In order to reduce expenditure an increasing number of courses are being closed.

**Percentage drop in individual degree courses 2006–2012**

French	21.3%	Economics	11.3%
Geography	20.6%	Biology	9.3%
Computer Science	18.3%	Business Studies	6.8%
German	16.7%	Philosophy	6.5%
Sociology	13.2%		

The University and College Union has shown that the overall number of full-time undergraduate courses in Britain has dropped by 27% in the period covered by the table. The decline represents a fall from 70,062 to 51,116 undergraduates. In England where students face the biggest rise in tuition fees, the number of degree courses has fallen by almost a third. In Scotland where student tuition is free, courses are down by just 3%. The reduction in course programmes weakens the basis for possible collaborations to develop new study programmes and research projects.



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2.4 Universities frequently emphasise the need to increase research funding. Available sources are frequently under intense pressure and are unlikely to provide a general solution for all institutions.

2.5 Collaborations between institutions to generate new courses of study and the production of e-learning materials can significantly change course costs. The University of Leicester in the CAMEL project has produced innovative course materials that have significantly improved student retention and achievement levels. The investment in such new delivery methods appears to have had a relatively limited impact on course designs across the sector.

The need for the development of cost based course designs which take into account student courses and space costings needs to be a priority. The increase in course fees to £9000 per year will increase the need to design study programmes for a specified cost.

**Few courses are prepared on the basis of a precise costing of teaching, space and general support costs. Research suggests teaching costs are often unreasonably high and space utilisation levels are frequently poor. Course costings, course designs, modular course systems and effective timetabling strategies are all issues that can be addressed by the consultancy team.**