

# The Ten Most Damaging Mistakes—and Solutions—in New Course Planning

Planning Mistake	Description of Mistake	Preventive Action	EAB Resource
#1: Relying solely on academic staff to organically surface new course ideas	Staff have demanding teaching and research responsibilities that limit their capacity to propose new programmes. Consequently, institutions propose too few viable programmes to meet annual growth goals.	Create forcing-function mechanisms for senior leaders to propose and evaluate new course ideas.	<b>Top-Down New Programme Opportunity Analyses</b>
#2: Losing competitive advantage through prolonged approval processes	Leaders review incomplete proposals that require multiple rounds of revision. This ultimately prolongs time-to-launch and weakens proposals' market competitiveness.	Supply academic staff champions with standardised templates to use when proposing new courses.	<b>Compendium of Business Case Templates</b>
#3: Using one-dimensional market data to evaluate demand potential	Institutions use insufficient or inappropriate data to evaluate market demand. As a result, demand projections for new courses underestimate competition and overestimate prospective student interest.	Consult multiple market demand data sources to generate more comprehensive analyses.	<b>Market Demand Validation Checklist</b>
#4: Designing courses around academic norms and preferences	Institutions design new courses that mirror existing ones on offer rather than those that the market demands. Prospective students ultimately enrol in competitor programmes that better meet their needs.	Vet programme design choices—such as credential, delivery, and admissions—for potential impact on enrolment.	<b>Programme Design Checklist</b>
#5: Conflating healthy and unhealthy cannibalisation	Leaders cannot accurately anticipate how new programme launches will impact existing course enrolments. Consequently, they launch courses that target markets already served or deny promising proposals for unfounded fear of cannibalisation.	Solicit structured feedback from academic staff on new programme proposals to identify those that may cannibalise existing programmes.	<b>Portfolio Cannibalisation Feedback Form</b>

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#6: Overlooking indirect, incremental, and knock-on costs	Institutions focus primarily on direct instructional costs when preparing budget projections, omitting less evident indirect, incremental, and knock-on costs from financial projections.	Use budget planning templates that prompt recognition of commonly overlooked costs.	<b>New Programme Budget Templates</b>
#7: Underinvesting in marketing	Institutions do not recognize new market pressures that have increased the cost and complexity of marketing new academic programmes. As a result, they underinvest in marketing.	Consider nuances of marketing different types of courses when setting marketing budgets.	<b>Marketing Investment Rules of Thumb</b>
#8: Aiming for near certainty in financial projections	Leaders base approval decisions on rigid financial projections. Since enrolments in new courses are inherently uncertain and programme launches rarely hit financial targets exactly, institutions may deny promising proposals with tolerable risk.	Evaluate a range of potential performance scenarios when making programme approval decisions.	<b>Financial Sensitivity Analysis Template</b>
#9: Committing inflexible, fixed resources before courses demonstrate demand	Institutions make unnecessary investments when launching new courses, adding inflexible resources that are difficult to repurpose if programmes do not generate expected enrolments.	Minimise upfront investment in fixed resources until courses demonstrate market demand.	<b>Cost-Minimising Tactics for New Programme Launches</b>
#10: Failing to react to post-launch performance	Leaders insufficiently monitor financial and enrolment metrics after launching new academic programmes. Consequently, they miss opportunities to retool programs in response to poor market performance or changing student preferences.	Conduct regular lookback analyses of financial and enrolment performance after launching new courses.	<b>Lookback Analysis Template</b>