



UNIVERSITY OF  
LINCOLN

# Schools Planning Framework for Academic Leaders: *A Practical Case Study*

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# 1. Introduction and Context

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The Schools Planning Framework project funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, seeks to explore the development of a practical application of a performance management tool, aimed at academic units.

The report sets out the findings of the project as a case study based at the University of Lincoln.

The University of Lincoln was named among the UK's best modern universities in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2016. We have some of the most satisfied students in the UK, rating in the top 25% nationally in a number of subject areas of the National Student Survey 2015 with Psychology ranked number one. We are recognised for our pioneering approach to working with employers, winning a Lord Stafford Award and a Times Higher Education Award. Graduate prospects are strong with nine out of ten of Lincoln's most recent graduates in work or further study six months after finishing their course. In the Research Excellence Framework 2014, more than half of our submitted research was judged to be internationally excellent or world leading, with Lincoln ranked in the UK's top 10 for quality of research outputs in two major subject areas.

The University comprises of nineteen academic schools, each led by an academic Head of School and these are structured under three academic colleges:

- The College of Science
- The College of Social Science
- The College of Arts

In recent years the University has moved away from the appointment of Heads of School on a rotating basis, instead choosing to create permanent leadership positions within its academic units, and restructuring College support structures to deliver enhanced levels of support for these pivotal roles. At the same time the University has made deliberate moves to enhance the positive and robust relationship with the Heads of School as a whole and the move to permanent positions along with the establishment of a Heads of School forum has helped to establish a collective voice for the group. These mechanisms have also facilitated greater levels of engagement with academic Heads on strategic developments within the organisation, nurturing an increased culture of trust and openness with the group.

Alongside the developing relationship with Heads of School there is an ever increasing amount of information and data available to them in their role. There is a growing awareness that Heads of School need to be supported rather than bombarded in order to help ensure this information can be understood and used in ways that help to improve outcomes for the organisation, and it is within this context that the project was delivered.

## 2. Background, Aims and Objectives

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Within Higher Education, the myriad of metrics can result in academic units instigating multiple planning processes, leading to a dilution of focus on core priorities and a lack of alignment with organisational goals.

The University already has well embedded performance management practices and has undertaken work to drill into organisational measures to more fully understand the impact of these at the level of its academic Colleges and the Schools that sit within them. The focus on performance delivery at the level of academic units has never been greater.

In 2014 the Leadership Foundation published research into Performance Management in UK higher education. That research focused on performance management approaches categorised as either Agency-based / Directive versus Enabling / Stewardship-based [see Fig.1].

This research concluded that; “Surviving in this complex economic, social and political environment will require institutions to establish a range of performance management mechanisms, both stewardship-based and agency-based, that help them manage and balance their short-term and long-term performance. We expect that the crafting of a hybrid system that fits their particular circumstances will be a key challenge for institutions” (LFHE 2014).

<b>Agency based / Directive approaches</b>	<b>Stewardship based / Enabling approaches</b>
<p>Characterised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance is defined in terms of goals at the different levels of the institution</li> <li>• Performance measures are developed and used to assess the extent to which goals are achieved, i.e. monitor performance</li> <li>• “Command and control” mechanisms : transactional leadership</li> <li>• Performance management mechanisms are developed to enable outcomes to be measured, monitored and controlled</li> </ul>	<p>Characterised by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mission or cause is selected and embedded throughout the institution</li> <li>• Where applicable measures of performance are developed, agreed and used by the institution stakeholders; but their role is to encourage understanding, learning and improvement rather than control</li> <li>• Self-management, shared leadership, and / or transformational leadership</li> <li>• Leaders pay attention to what is meaningful for the institution and for staff (even if what is meaningful cannot be measured)</li> </ul>

[Fig.1]

## Project Aims and Objectives

This project seeks to explore the experience of the Heads of School, the leaders of academic units, to design a practical performance management tool that will translate the many and varied performance measures required of academic units into **a single unified performance management framework, capturing key areas of focus, priority objectives and measures aligned to organisational goals.**

In delivering this the project aimed to:

- i. Design a practical application of an agency-based / directive performance management tool aimed at the level of academic units that translate measures and objectives in ways that have meaning and value for Heads of School and their staff.
- ii. Bring together the current mixed practice across its academic units, recognising and drawing on best practice across the institution.
- iii. Improve awareness and understanding amongst academic leaders through the framework as a single point of reference for communicating key priorities and objectives for academic units.
- iv. Provide a framework that will create greater levels of alignment between organisational goals and those achieved by academic units.

## Key Approaches

Bringing together two key approaches has shaped the project, helping to illuminate the experience of current practices and evaluate their effectiveness. These approaches are:

**Balanced Scorecard** - At the outset this project set out to understand how a Balanced Scorecard approach may help to inform the work. The Balanced Scorecard is a performance management methodology. Originally developed by Kaplan and Norton, the concepts within this approach have spread widely within the private sector, however, it has yet to make a significant impact within Higher Education.

**Design Thinking** - In addition this project adopted an approach taken from Design Thinking. A concept initially developed by Tim Browne, this approach asks that consumers are treated as customers in order to understand, through direct observation, what people want and need to enhance their day to day working lives. The Design Thinking approach is summarised by Tim Browne in his Ted Talk in 2009 in which he urges designers to think big.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/tim\\_brown\\_urges\\_designers\\_to\\_think\\_big?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_brown_urges_designers_to_think_big?language=en)

In this instance the approach was applied to the project treating academic leaders as the customer with a clear goal that the outcome needed to improve their experience of current performance management processes and support them in making performance improvement happen in their areas.

The directive methodology of the Balanced Scorecard, over layered with the enabling customer focused approach of Design Thinking is intended to generate the hybrid approach suggested by the Leadership Foundations research. The scope of the project was therefore established with this customer focus in mind to;

***Create a Schools Planning Framework that adds value to Heads of School and to the planning process***

# 3. Methodology

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The aim and objectives of the project were supported through a number of information gathering processes which set out to:

- i. Collect baseline data regarding current perceptions of, understanding and engagement with performance management and planning amongst Heads of School.
- ii. Evaluate the data to better understand obstacles and the cultural shift needed to effectively implement and embed a common framework.

Through our initial interactions with the project group, and influenced by key project approaches, a key question emerged:

***If Heads of School are at the heart of delivering organisational performance what does the planning framework need to deliver?***

This question embeds a powerful assumption that Heads of School are indeed pivotal in delivering improved performance outcomes on the ground and as strategic leaders for their areas any planning framework must support them to do this.

## The use of 'Design Thinking' as a project approach

This project has taken on a theoretical model derived from the process of 'Design Thinking'. Design Thinking is a methodology that 'imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centered design ethos' (Brown, 2008). By this we mean that Design Thinking treats consumers as customers in order to understand, through direct observation, what people want and need to enhance their day to day working lives. Design Thinking means that instead of asking designers to make an already developed idea more attractive, they are being asked to create ideas that better meet the needs of the customer (Brown 2008).

Tim Brown states that there are five aspects of effective Design Thinking and implementation, these are:

- Empathy
- Integrative thinking
- Optimism
- Experimentalism
- Collaboration

**Empathy** - Design thinkers have a 'people first' approach. Great design thinkers imagine a world from multiple perspectives.

**Integrative thinking** - Design thinkers see all aspects of a problem even if they are sometimes contradictory problems.

**Optimism** - Design thinkers see that one potential solution is better than existing alternatives.

**Experimentalism** - Design thinkers pose questions and explore constraints in creative ways.

**Collaboration** - Design thinkers tend to work in more than one area and with a range of different people in order to facilitate their ideas.

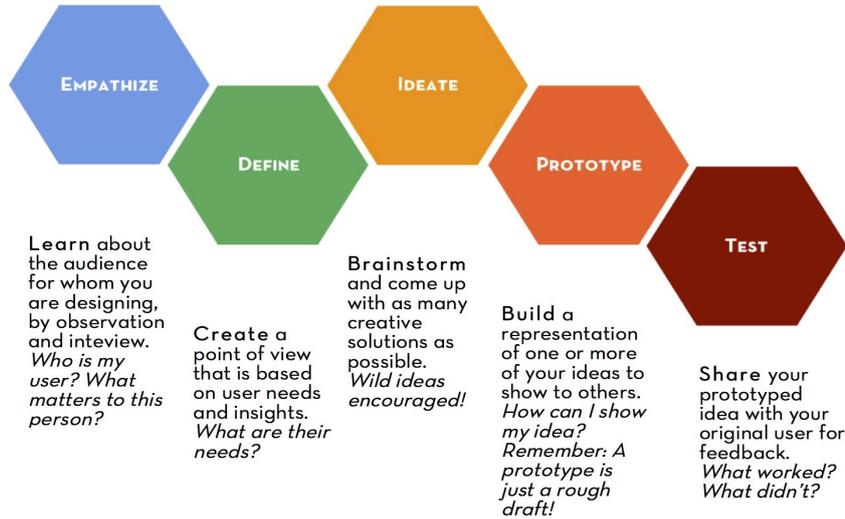
Design Thinking is actually less about thinking and more about doing. It is not something you have, it is something you do. With digital development life cycles moving faster than ever, it is incredibly important to put an emphasis on output. That output needs to address the endless array of devices and contexts that come with designing products in a digital environment (Bryan, 2014).

In this project Design Thinking required that we approach the existing and multiple performance management processes and view Heads of School as the customer not simply a participant in a process ultimately owned by another part of the Institution. Heads of School became the end users of performance management process rather than its servants.

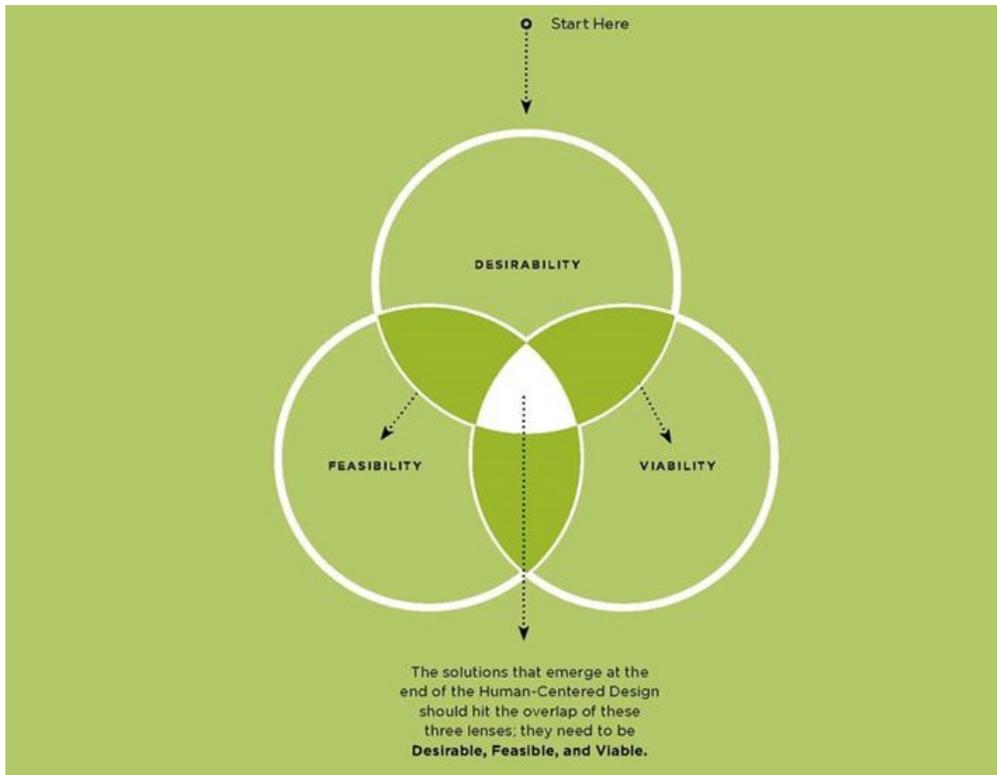
Design Thinking requires an empathetic starting point relating to the customer experience, starting with defining what is desirable. The starting point for this project was to clearly determine the current experience of Heads of School and understanding how current performance management mechanisms were supporting them to deliver organisational performance management in their area, before moving into a design specification phase to identify solutions.

This approach made an assumption that Heads of School are at the heart of delivering performance management and therefore the project approached Heads of School to identify solutions based on this assumption. [See Fig.3]

# We are all DESIGNERS!



[Fig.2]



[Fig.3]

## Desirable, Feasible and Viable Model

Image from: <http://www.hcdconnect.org/toolkit/en/download> VIA <http://www.peerinsight.com/musings/2013/10/24/my-go-to-resources-on-design-thinking>

## Mixed-method Methodology

The project used a mixed-method methodology consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Mixed-method research uses both deductive and inductive reasoning, obtains both quantitative and qualitative data, attempts to validate and complement findings, and takes a balanced approach to research. Quantitative methods rely on objective analysis and use data collection to determine general themes that quantify a hypothesis. Quantitative analysis is used mostly in scientific data collection, where responses are measured numerically to produce statistical information that can be used to determine outputs that benefit from the support of primary objective data. Quantitative research methods involve data collection from such outputs as surveys and questionnaires. The benefit of using a quantitative methodology means that data is collected using standardised methods that can then be replicated and analysed using statistical techniques.

A qualitative methodology differs due to its data collection using subjective reasoning to determine responses. Qualitative research believes that there is no objective social reality and that all knowledge is constructed by observers who are the product of traditions, beliefs and social and political environments (NSF, 2002). Responses are usually gathered using methods such as exploratory focus groups and individual and/or group interviews. Qualitative data collection provides a different perspective from quantitative analysis because of its methods of reasoning.

When subjective and objective reasoning are combined through quantitative and qualitative perspectives, it means that the research can be potentially strengthened. When a theoretical perspective is also used it can create a triangular methodology which is the strongest and most reliable approach when conducting any analysis involving varying levels of data.

The first method used to collate responses was from conducting an exploratory focus/working group involving three Heads of School from different colleges within the University. This working group formed views based on approaches and problems with current performance management processes, the support given to implement and understand these processes, and also the engagement with performance management from an organisational perspective. The working group had regular scheduled meetings at the preliminary stages of the project in order to determine a direction. The working group then continued to meet at significant points throughout the project.

Another method used to conduct data collection for this project was the use of a survey. The survey comprised of sixteen questions that were a combination of both multiple choice and free comment questions. The multiple choice questions had answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a scale of 1-5, and also two free comment questions that required a subjective response. The questions were divided into two sub-sections, the first being 'Understanding and Engagement with Operational Performance Management' and the second, 'Support and Operational Performance Management Processes'.

The challenges faced throughout this project occurred in relation to the data collection tasks. These challenges arose due to the sporadic nature of responses gathered through the survey. A two week time slot was scheduled to gather responses and this went slightly over time.

Low participant numbers meant that the data gathered from the survey did not hold much validity as a standalone. Therefore it was important to take into consideration the information gathered from focus groups to rationalise the survey responses. By combining the survey data and the focus group views, the strength of the data collected became of more value because it was reinforced by extended primary data and theoretical perspectives. Combining these approaches made the data form an overall triangular methodological enquiry and by nature, triangulation resonates with strength and structure.

## Balanced Scorecard as an approach

The Balanced Scorecard as well as a strategic approach can also be used as a performance management planning tool and it is in this later guise that it has helped to inform the project. Specifically the following key characteristics of the scorecard have been used to help focus the project outcomes:

<p><b>Alignment</b></p>	<p>In a Balanced Scorecard approach there is a clear alignment between organisational strategic goals and the actions taken on the ground. In this approach the ‘golden thread’ that links the actions plans within departments and divisions with the stated goals of the organisation are explicit and can be readily understood. This ensures that on the ground priority focus is placed on those activities of strategic importance.</p> <p>In the project existing arrangements were reviewed to determine how well aligned School Plans are with those at University and College level.</p>
<p><b>Balanced Perspective</b></p>	<p>Traditionally a scorecard takes account of four distinct perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External /Customer—Including student experience</li> <li>• Internal—Organisational capacity and performance (including research)</li> <li>• Financial—Funding the future, income generation and growth</li> <li>• Learning &amp; Growth—Leadership, culture, collaboration and continuous improvement</li> </ul> <p>All aspects of the scorecard need to be balanced to have an impact on vision and strategy. Representing all areas ensures that all of the elements that drive and underpin sustained success are included, avoiding over focus on any single area to the detriment of others.</p>
<p><b>Lead &amp; Lag indicators</b></p>	<p>In a traditional model Balanced Scorecard recommends a balance between <b>lead</b> and <b>lag</b> indicators as measures for success.</p> <p><b>Lead indicators</b> are predictive, typically input orientated, ‘in-process’ and underpin and contribute towards achieving successful outcomes. Generally they can be directly managed, setting out plans and initiatives to influence these and how they will monitor on-track predictors of success.</p> <p><b>Lag indicators</b> are measures typically of the desired outcomes and as such are results and output driven (they are usually an ‘after the event’ measurement). Therefore lag measures are useful for charting progress but can be of limited use when attempting to manage and influence the future.</p> <p>In the HE environment many of the externally driven indicators are understandably lag indicators.</p>
<p><b>Holistic Approach</b></p>	<p>Performance Management has to consider all of its individual elements in relation to its whole .</p>

[Fig.4]

Some anticipated benefits of using a balanced scorecard at an operational planning level is its ability to provide a planning framework that:

- Helps managers to monitor and control the delivery of a definable set of activities
- Supports increased alignment between desired organisational outcomes with operational initiatives
- Facilitates improved understanding and communication of operational performance
- Helps to bring together various strands and areas of school planning

## Survey Themes

As part of the projects benchmark data collection a survey was designed and sent out to all Heads of Schools across the three Colleges within the University. The survey was structured under two sections; **Understanding and Engagement (with performance management )** and **Processes and Support**.

'Understanding and Engagement' aimed to determine the current levels of understanding and engagement amongst Heads of School with performance management processes and key performance targets. 'Processes and Support' aimed to establish levels of satisfaction with processes that support Heads of School to deliver performance management and what individual support Heads of School receive to manage the effectiveness of performance management across their areas.

The survey results showed mixed responses with varying levels of agreement and disagreement towards each question. The nature of these mixed responses meant that as a collective set of data the results did not provide any solid foundation about the effectiveness of performance management as a culture within the institution.

### Survey Analysis :

The outputs from the survey produced a varied response across ten questions. However, when Heads of School were asked about their role and levels of clarity towards performance management, they responded with;

- Heads of School see themselves as strategic leaders for their areas;
- They are clear what the School is expected to deliver in order to contribute towards delivering the University's strategic objectives
- They recognise that the culture of performance management within the organisation is undergoing a period of significant change.

However responses tended to be in general less positive when asked about their level of engagement with setting key performance targets; their perceptions of the organisational culture of managing performance; the confidence amongst the group at their ability to manage against school targets; and the levels of satisfaction with the planning tools available to them:

- Heads of School had a mixed response towards the idea that they were part of the process when setting KPI's for their area. 63% either strongly agreed or agreed that they did, whilst 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.
- 50% of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed that there is a strong culture of managing organisational performance, whilst 31% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- There was a similar mixed response to the University's performance management culture being enabling and facilitative. 50% agreed with the statement, whilst 37% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12% disagreed.
- 75% of Heads of School believe that they can manage staff effectively against performance standards in their areas and 88% feel confident about setting standards to evaluate and determine the performance capabilities of their staff.
- When asked if they believed that the planning resources available to them help them to effectively run their school, this also elicited a very mixed response from Heads of School with 25% strongly agreeing, 38% agreeing, 12% neither agree nor disagree and 25% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

In addition Heads of School were given an opportunity to give feedback on the tools or support they believe would help them to manage performance management, because this question was worded with tools *or* support the output themes have defined themselves. Responses included; operational school dashboard; one agreed source of information; benchmark data; clearer communication lines and clearer outlines of performance criteria.

# 4. Challenges and considerations

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This project surfaced a number of challenges and considerations, including:

## Dealing with fragmented approaches and multiple stakeholders

- Current performance management mechanisms have been created and are owned by various areas within the institution, as a result, they are fragmented and implicit within this is the approach that Heads of School are in some way the servant to the process rather than Heads of School as key customers of performance management processes.
- This fragmentation leads to a scenario where each owner can be protectionist about their piece of the performance management jigsaw. For the process to improve other stakeholders need to buy-in to the principle as experienced by Heads of School – leading us to question what are the benefits to individual areas giving up some of the control they have at present?
- With significant numbers of stakeholders, there is always a danger that the work becomes too complex or fraught with managing too many expectations.

## Aligning work timeframes to fit with other relevant work and existing practices

- The University of Lincoln is currently in the process of developing its next strategic plan which is due to launch in early 2016. This provides an opportunity to align this project with the new plan, however this also means we need to ensure this work does not progress out of step with the development of the strategy.
- More broadly it is important to understand how this project will fit with other parts of performance management practices ensuring that links are developed where necessary.

## Understanding who has the remit

- The project funded through the LFHE has provided a focus and drive for this project to be commissioned however with various performance management mechanisms owned by multiple stakeholders across the organisation, it may be relevant to question who within the organisation has a remit for the oversight of these separate but interlinking processes? And under normal circumstances how would work of this nature be instigated?

### Some interesting questions:

- Who are the key customers for performance management processes and whose primary needs does it need serve?
- Who has the remit to instigate work that touches on multiple interlinking processes?
- Where work is taking place how will multiple stakeholders be engaged and managed to ensure work does not get impeded or stifled by too many competing interests?
- When is the right timing to review and implement new performance management processes?

# 5. Summary of Findings

## Current practices as experienced by Heads of School

The current situation evaluated against the key themes drawn from the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and viewed through the Heads of School experience as a customer is summarised in Fig 7.

BSC theme	Current systems and processes	How this is experienced by Heads of School as a 'customer' of the process
Alignment	<p>Alignment between school plans and core organisational goals could be strengthened</p> <p>Plans and strategies at College and School level do not have a prescribed format</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heads of School can see the links between their School plans and those of their Colleges and the University but because there are not planning templates this relies on them interpreting the links</li> <li>• Individual school target measures generated centrally do not necessarily align the ambitions of the College leading to confusion about what Schools should be planning to deliver</li> </ul>
Lead & Lag indicators	<p>The key performance measures for the institution are focused around external outcome measures - which are cascaded down to Schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures for the School are predominantly outcome based on external measures, and do not tend to provide a focus on how these are to be achieved and what predictive indicators may be useful</li> </ul>
Balanced perspective	<p>Heads of School are increasingly strategic leaders for their area</p> <p>The recent Schools review process involved Schools assessing themselves against key benchmark data and defining a strategic direction for the School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This allowed us as Heads of School to engage and listen to stakeholders at all levels – this was a positive process and should be replicated in the planning cycle supports Heads of School to be at the heart of a 'top-down bottom-up approach'</li> <li>• The performance management process should provide opportunities for Heads of School to engage across students and academic colleagues to develop a strategic vision for the School</li> <li>• We need to be able to marshal ideas and simplify the complexity <i>"We are where the rubber hits the tar"</i></li> </ul>
Holistic approach	<p>Fragmented, developed ad-hoc</p> <p>Existing planning and performance management processes have been developed over time and within various areas of the institution processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duplication of action planning <i>"I've got four actions plans in my desk draw all for similar periods – you can't practically manage against all four at the same time"</i></li> <li>• Focuses on short-term outputs that will deliver results within the life of this particular action plan – short term results are needed but sometimes we need to be brave and keep going with longer term plans</li> </ul>
	<p>'Reinventing the wheel' - various processes require Heads of School to respond with an action plan but do not define what this needs to look like</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constantly re-inventing the wheel with yet another plan but without any guidance on what this needs to look like, so we're all off doing our own thing</li> <li>• This approach is perceived as neither directive or particularly enabling</li> <li>• There is no overarching planning cycle so many plans have overlapping but differing time frames</li> </ul>

[Fig.7]

The current situation felt by Heads of School in relation to performance management is that the nature of the fragmented action planning has a real and practical impact.

The current multiple planning processes, many with no required template results in;

- Each Head of School creating their own template for planning with no formalised structures.
- Despite this being seen as freedom to act it is often perceived by the Heads of School as 're-creating the wheel' and is viewed as neither particularly enabling or facilitative.
- The absence of clear structures weakens the ability to readily align school plans with University and College strategy.
- Practical challenges of managing against multiple action plans resulting in a dilution of focus and effort.

In addition, the institutional focus on externally driven outcome performance measures can leave a gap within planning processes for Heads of School in developing a comprehensive understanding around predictive targets in relation to how these outcomes will be achieved.

Heads of School are a key component of delivering performance management and are at the heart of that process, therefore as an institution we need to be able to simplify the complexity surrounding operational performance and support Heads of School to be at the centre of a top-down/bottom-up approach.

## Identified areas for development

The project identified a number of areas for development to improve the experience of Heads of School and ensure they are integrated within the performance management practices of the institution. These summarised within the following themes:

### **1. Data, Measures and Targets -**

- Increased engagement with and understanding of School specific targets and measures, ensuring these provide a comprehensive basis to support the management and monitoring of school plans.
- Heads of School are further engaged in the development of key organisational measures and targets.
- Increased clarity around reporting and monitoring mechanisms and where possible reporting mechanisms are multifunctional and therefore meet various monitoring requirements.
- A greater balance and understanding of lead as well as lag measures, ensuring lead indicators are identified for key processes that support shared priority outcomes.

### **2. The Planning Process -**

- Facilitates a top down and bottom up approach—the planning process provides an opportunity in a facilitated way to take on board the student voice, support and academic colleagues views. The process supports Heads of School to marshal the ideas of many—simplifying complexity.
- Takes place within a well established cycle providing flexibility to be responsive as new metrics and information emerge but in a unified way and is not knee jerk.
- Increased understanding and clarity around how School Plans link with other organisational plans and other processes such as appraisal.

### **3. Planning Tools -**

- Effectively unify School plans, reducing duplication and replacing multiple planning processes.
- Provides an opportunity to create a strategic vision for the school supporting the Head of School as a strategic leader for their area.
- Supports a balance between long and short-term actions and strategies, effectively delivering more immediate outcomes whilst supporting longer term improvement strategies.
- Provide easy access to key information related to developing, monitoring and managing plans.
- Are comprehensive and yet customisable to meet the needs of different areas.
- Pre-populated where appropriate—simplifying the process for Heads of School.

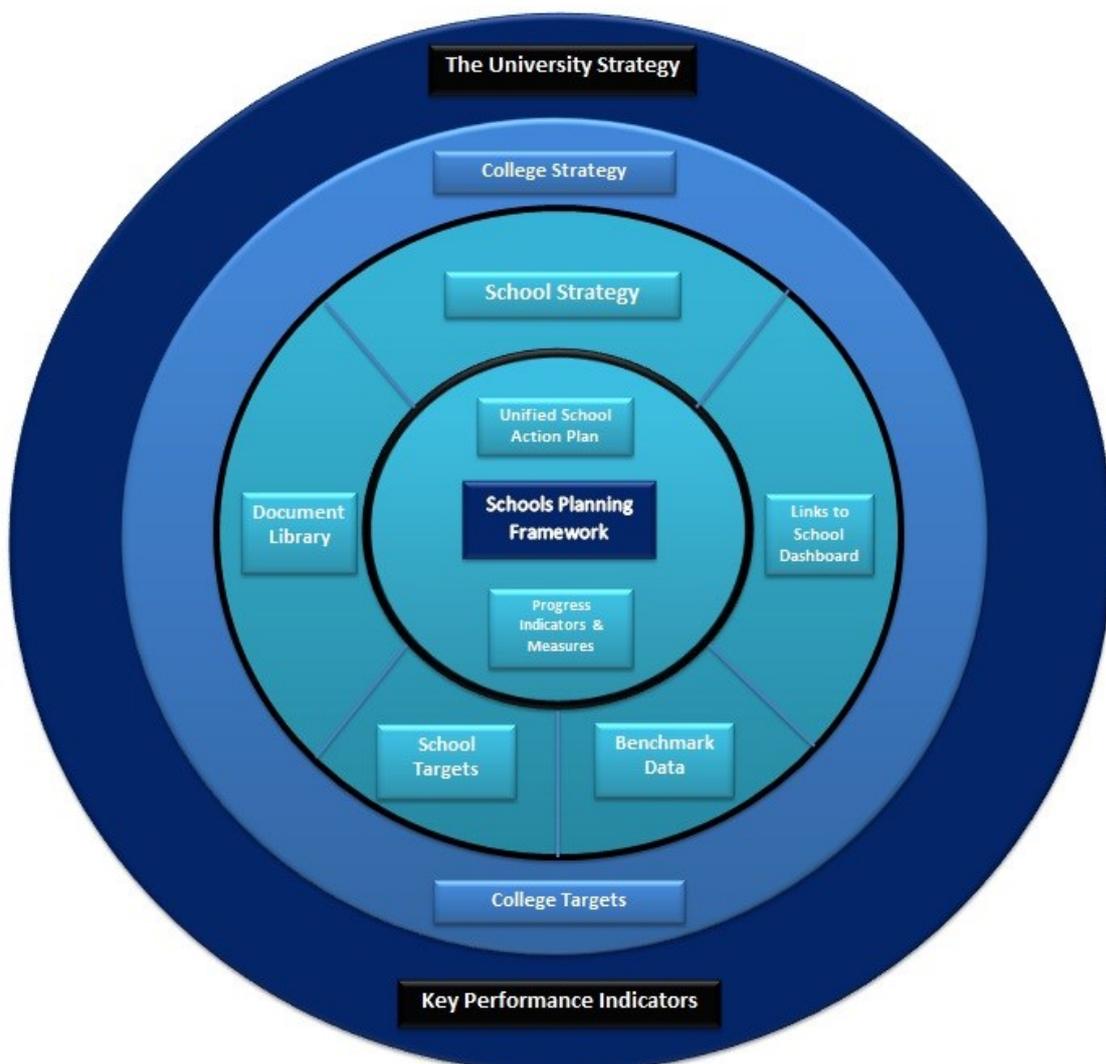
The initial finding identified three streams of activities for potential development as outlined above. This project has focused on the development of the Planning Tools and the remainder of the report will establish the initial specification for the tool, however it is expected that this work may touch on other work streams as it is developed. We believe that initially the tool has the greatest potential to positively impact Heads of School.

# 6. Schools Planning Framework

The 'Schools Planning Framework' (SPF) is conceived as a directive planning tool for Heads of School, meeting their needs as customers and owners of key improvement deliverables. The SPF aims to be an electronic platform that is customisable to each Head of School, however it is intended to offer the following functionality with key design specifications:

## Broad design specifications:

- The design of the Schools Planning Framework came from the ideas around the balanced scorecard approaches of alignment.
- The circular design destabilises the traditional triangular hierarchy and puts Heads of School at the heart of the performance management tool.
- The outer circles are there to represent the other plans and strategies including the University's strategic plan and the College plans to which the School is a part of.
- The Schools Planning Framework has been designed to be extremely simple with button navigations and will also include drag and drop options.



[Fig.8]

## Functionality and other design principles:

The initial concept for the SPF includes the following key aspects and functionality that will be further explored and developed during prototype design.

**Unified Action Plan (UAP)** - core to the Planning Framework and one of the most sophisticated parts is the Unified Action Plan (UAP) section. This section is key to reducing duplication and bringing together current planning processes into a single unified area.

The UAP will offer the ability to **link planned actions across multiple themes** (for example linking an action plan in response to student surveys and feedback, or actions that respond to academic quality processes). Importantly this provides a single action planning place that can be updated and reviewed in response to multiple processes or new information. Providing a link to different themes will enable Schools to be able to report their plans collectively as a whole set or individually against different themes - thus enabling them to provide an action plan for reporting purposes but the system hosting ensures this is kept under a single unified place.

The UAP also **supports short and long term planning** providing a holding place for both short-term and longer-term activities whose status can be updated and archived as actions are completed. This is where Heads of School will be able to fully control and utilise what the action plan sets out, what is it, who is responsible, and who is accountable for monitoring indicators and school outcome targets.

The UAP will also provide the ability to identify which staff are accountable for activities and who are responsible (those who will contribute towards its delivery but do not have ultimate accountability for ensuring it is delivered). It is expected that this may support personal objective setting and workload modelling.

**School Vision** - Heads of School identified that recent review processes had been positive in terms of providing an opportunity to investigate benchmark data and engage students and staff across their school to consider their strategic direction. In addition to the Unified Action Plan it is proposed that the SPF will provide a place holder for the development of a School Strategy and that this is supported by also providing easy access and sign posting to relevant benchmark information. Later developments may also include tools that support Schools to facilitate these discussions and interrogate benchmark and market data.

**Alignment across key strategic themes** - it is proposed that the design of the SPF will aid alignment of Schools plans with those of College and the Institution through ensuring that key strategic themes run through from the University strategy into the Schools Vision and Unified Action Plan - providing an explicit and ready alignment between key strategic areas of focus and planned actions at School level.

**Key Data Sets** - The Schools Planning Framework has three key data sets that will also contain direct links to the current dashboard information that is on offer. The three identified data sets would include; School outcome targets, benchmark/School evaluation data (to support strategic planning) and monitoring indicators/lead measures (as defined by the project/School). These provide prepopulated success measures and reduce time and effort by Heads of School. Creating a very clear link between centralised targets and measures and those within the Schools Framework is a directive approach and it was therefore important that as customers Heads of School were bought in to this and identified this element as enabling during the data gathering phase.

**Document Library** - simple yet effective, the many reports and information sources regularly distributed to Heads of School can be difficult to track. It is proposed that a strong feature of the SPF is that it will contain a document library. This feature means that the most recent reports within the University will be available on demand and collated in one place. An example of the reports chosen for inclusion comprise of the following: PAR Report, Academic School Review and Annual Monitoring Report.

# 7. Resources

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A key aspect of this project was to offer a practical example of a hybrid approach to develop a performance management approach, in a way that supports other HE institutions to think about their approaches to elements of their performance management practices.

This project offers that hybrid through combining the directive principles of the balanced scorecard approached through a customer centred design, putting Heads of School at the very heart of planning and delivering performance improvement in their areas. Whilst some of the findings may be obvious they only appear once viewed through the lens of Head of School as a customer of performance processes.

In addition the project at Lincoln has produced a set of benchmark data that over time may be used to evaluate whether this approach is effective in delivering a directive tool whilst positioning Heads of School as strategic leaders of performance improvement.

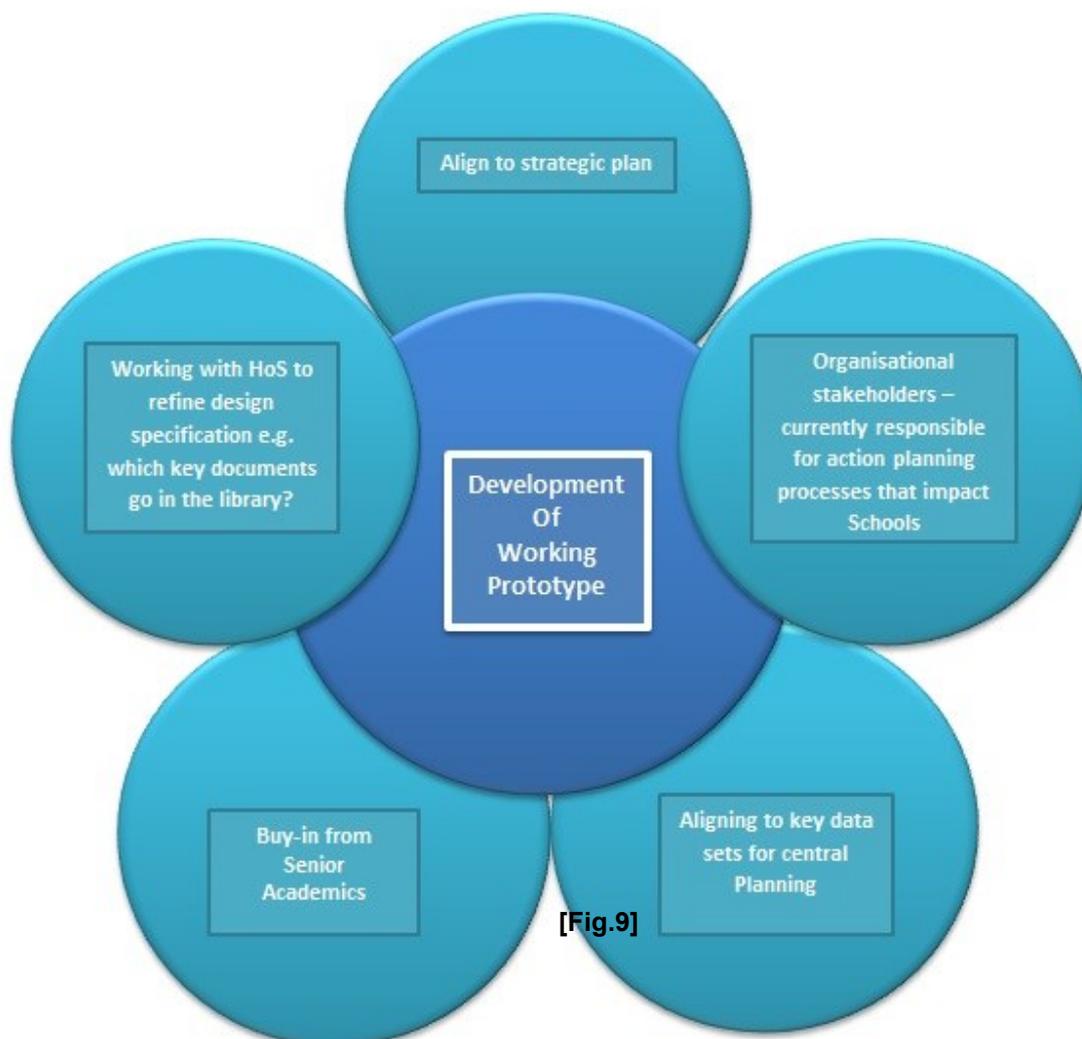
In response to the initial findings the project has established a broad specification for a planning tool. As this work develops into its next phase, work with Heads of School within a College will refine the Schools Planning Framework design specifications in the development and delivery of a working prototype.

# 8. Recommendations for next steps

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The findings from the current experience of Heads of School indicate that a unified planning tool has the potential to significantly simplify planning processes for Heads of School, reducing duplication, time and effort whilst improving Schools plans in terms of their alignment to key strategic themes. In addition it is hoped that a single framework will improve communication and understanding around core performance priorities and provide a better foundation for both short-term and longer term planning. These potential benefits make a good case for progressing the development of the Schools Planning Framework through a pilot project with one of the academic Colleges.

However the development of the pilot will need to take place at a time that aligns with the roll out of the new University Strategic Plan. In addition this part of the project, along with the development of the University strategy has prompted some further questions about the most appropriate level for some elements of the planning process to reside, either at School, College or University level and it is important that these questions have been addressed prior to embarking on the development of the planning tool.



[Fig.9]

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# 9. References

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