

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. ‘What are the challenges of designing interdisciplinary postgraduate curricula?’
2. ‘How could we respond to the challenges?’



METHOD

- Qualitative case study design
- Two programmes aspiring to interdisciplinarity: An applied social science programme and a health science programme
- Interviews with Course Directors, Head of Administration, Module Leads, Teachers, a Teaching Fellow and an Associate Course Director.



2. EXCESSIVE WORKLOAD

- Excessive workload for students due to overload of content, assessment, contact hours, and readings

Of course everybody has got their own interest and own ideas about what would be useful so we ended up with quite long list of things that might go into the course. It was difficult to prioritize the most important things (SML1).

Second term was much more challenging because it was information-heavy, session-heavy, it is a lot to take in, and there weren't any free sessions, students find it quite challenging, that is reflected in their feedback (HCD ML1).



3. INCOHERENT CURRICULA

- **Lack of curriculum integration, collaborative culture, wider perspective, and pedagogical approaches to facilitate integrative learning**

...you obviously need to consider the implications of what you teach in a wider perspective. It is more challenging because you need to know a bit of everything (HOML).

What came clear this year, while Module Leads are putting a lot of effort within their module, they hadn't really looked to the other modules, so things were overlapping (HCD-ML2).

This is something, I would say, is true in interdisciplinary courses. In general, people fight for their corners (SCD-ML). I think that is a part of the reason why we ended up moving [this] module into a separate core rather than continuing trying to do it as a joint course with [other discipline]. If you got totally separate perspectives, it is just confusing...There were other practical [organizational] challenges. I think that [interdisciplinary] approach might have worked if we had a bit more continuity and [more negotiation] (SML1).



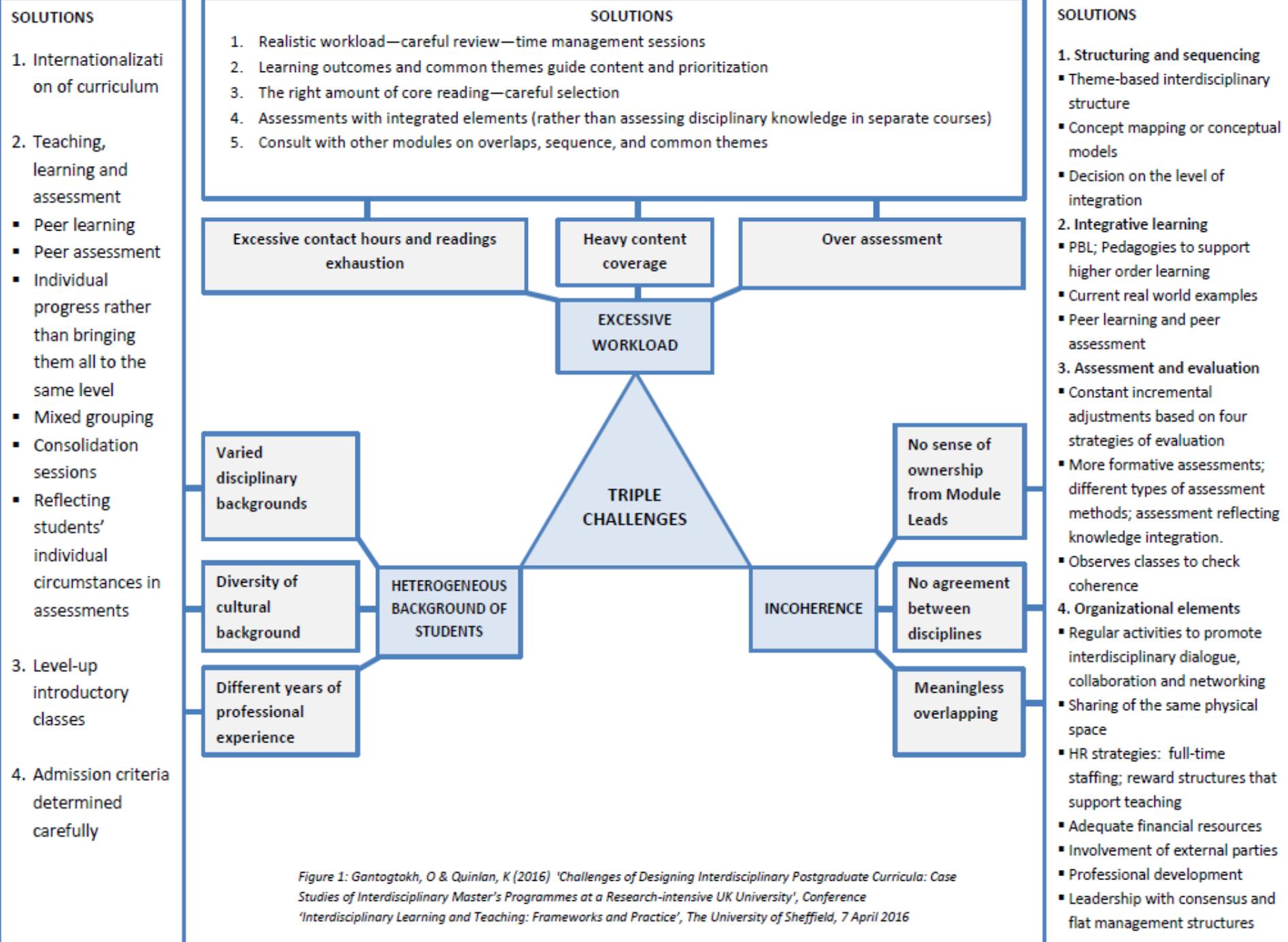


Figure 1: Gantogtokh, O & Quinlan, K (2016) 'Challenges of Designing Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Curricula: Case Studies of Interdisciplinary Master's Programmes at a Research-intensive UK University', Conference 'Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching: Frameworks and Practice', The University of Sheffield, 7 April 2016

SOLUTIONS TO COHERENCE-BUILDING

Organizational elements which provide favourable conditions for coherence-building.

Logical connections of content, structure and sequence

Integrative learning in the teaching and learning processes

Assessment, evaluation and refinement

COHERENCE

COHERENCE

Organizational elements which provide favourable conditions for coherence-building.

This framework for coherence-building is based on Stark (1986) and Knight (2001)

What we learned

- Awareness of the complex nature of interdisciplinary curricula.
- Specific strategies that have emerged for coping with these challenges.
- Four elements of coherence-building, focusing on organizational element.





THANK YOU!