

COCIS Hot House Case Study

November 2016 (drafted after 16 week event review)

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Summary

The University adopted a “Hot House” approach to address issues of overburden in one research area (COCIS) in order to apply lessons learned institutionally.

The event was a success, and has resulted in a new way of working for COCIS. Administrative improvements linked with this work can be expected to bear fruit across other research areas, but also in administration more generally. While the approach was not without its challenges, the team feel that it brokered new and positive relationships, with unintended positive consequences.

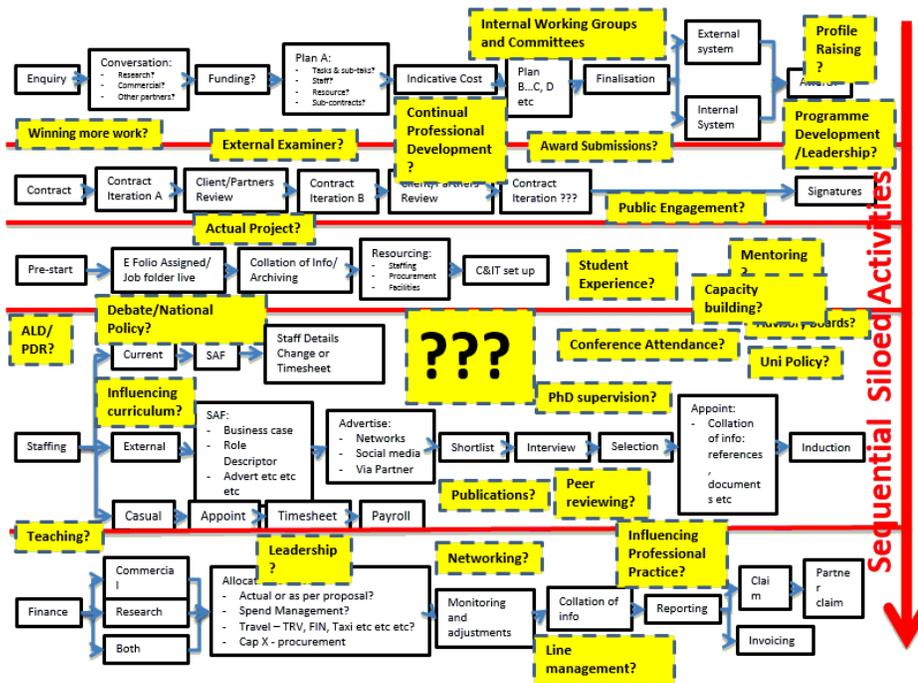
This report outlines the event, to support future learning around such activity.

Background

Context

During a Corporate Plan cascade briefing concern was raised that some internal processes were considered barriers, not enablers, to areas being competitive and growing external funding relating to research and commercial activity.

“Napierised”: to stagnate in an endless cycle of administration by “just needing to” undertake activities which represent no value add.



(The above shows one perspective on the complicated web of internal processes, from an academic view)

It was agreed that a targeted intervention would be undertaken to explore the issues. This would be done through a focussed effort with COCIS and relevant internal service providers to identify process improvement opportunities.

Iain McIntosh sponsored the work. Other senior stakeholders included the Directors of RIO, Finance, HR and the School Support Service.

Defining a Hot House

The Hot House approach aimed to demonstrate the University Values and Behaviours and was mindful of our Professional Service Standards.

During the course of the event the Hot House metaphor was explored to help explain the intervention. In this the Hot House was a bounded place where things can grow for transplantation into the outside world. Reflecting on the nature of the event one of the participants described, when asked what went well:

Bringing people together from different departments with the time, space and licence to share and solve problems

Goal

The Hot House aimed to identify process, policy and/or procedure changes that:

- bring about a measurable enhancement to commercial areas ability to
- deliver streamlined processes through university systems and
- create autonomy where possible.

Deliverables, by the end of August 2016, were set to be:

- an approved set of standard contracts applicable to the majority of business expected to be won through COCIS and suitable for use in other commercial areas.
- proposed clear roles and responsibilities designed to support the rapid delivery of commercial contracts in COCIS and suitable for use in other commercial areas

The Hot House was also intended to serve as i) learning as to the readiness of the University to use such approaches, ii) a measure of the capability we have in delivering these, and iii) as evidence to assess the appropriateness of such interventions for our institution.

During the briefing meetings and the event itself the outcomes of the Hot House continued to evolve. One participant noted, when asked what could be done differently:

The aim/purpose [...] needs to be very clear and kept on track. I went in with the aim of how do we encourage commercialisation and it ended up being drawn into the limitations of existing processes [...]

Other participants, at the 16 week closing meeting, noted that the ability to embrace unexpected outcomes was a strength of the Hot House approach and that the outcomes achieved were the richer for having gone through the emergent process during the Hot House.

Outcomes

At the 16 week review it was noted that outcomes from the event have met the participant's expectations, including unpredicted but positive outcomes.

Participants noted in anonymous feedback and at closing meeting that the relationships and connections formed during the event were key to these benefits being realised.

We wouldn't have been able to make the connections with colleagues that we now have without the Hot House.

It was also noted that attention on this event from senior management supported action as did the express expectation that actions would be taken.

People have taken ownership of certain areas and made progress. I think having this linked to ULT has made sure of this.

Pre Award Benefits

- Pre-award improved with an early-intervention approach to research projects.
- This is supported by existing planned improvements to HR employment processes (including working to learn from how Nick in Bright Red Triangle gets good students on-board).
- This is also supported by existing process and system developments in the Research Management System.
- RIO has developed a new contract type has been developed to bring additional capacity on board to the research area.
- ERC have investigated and are now actively working to promote activity, and building on relationships started in the Hot House to strengthen the linkage between philanthropic giving and research funding.

Post Award Benefits

- Post award enhanced support through new role in S3, where a staff member has been recruited with specific relevant skills and experience.
- Finance have committed to supporting conversations at budget discussion stage, to include planning to ensure resource is supported in breaks between projects, which links with existing conversations S3 School Managers have with Deans.

Auxiliary Benefits

Following the event, the team have continued to benefit from connections made during the Hot House.

The Hot House has enabled many participants to further develop an enhanced business model to the University for which strategic funds have been sought. At the time of writing the business case for this is being worked up to include explicit quantifiable cost benefit analysis. At the 16 week review meeting an outline of the potential of the model was given. This included an explicit link to University strategic aims, not least strengthening a mutually beneficial tripartite relationship between industry, research and teaching.

Future work

As part of the workshop, the theme of "business development" was identified, but, not explored. This may benefit from further attention.

Key Learning

Feedback from the team at the closing meeting

When reflecting on the event at the closing meeting, the team recommended using the Hot House approach for future activities in the university. However, they suggested that spending additional time on scoping the activity could allow for better use of workshop time.

The team cautioned that it would be beneficial to understand where events similar to the Hot House should be used, as opposed to, say, activity managed through the annual planning round or shorter interventions.

The team suggested the following critical items to identify

- Who authorises the activity
- Who manages the activity
- Appropriate staffing

The importance of defining appropriate scope were noted

- In order to identify the approach to be undertaken
- And then define the appropriate timing of this.

Team members noted that in order to get the most out of the event participants in it need to bring with them three essential elements:

Passion for what we do (a solution focussed view); technical knowledge; and the capability to enact change

Observations from facilitators

As facilitators completing this exercise, we would reflect the importance of addressing the following factors;

People

Staffing of the project team is the most costly element of resourcing such activity. Staffing has the largest impact on success: either through individuals not being able to attend; or through staffing assigned not having the appropriate knowledge skills or experience.

Ensuring participants are well briefed before the Hot House is important on areas such as: their role and involvement; the sphere of influence of the activity; what level of empowered action is needed; and commitment required from participants. In relation to this activity the facilitators sought to achieve this through checking membership of the Hot House and speaking to all participants ahead of the Hot House itself.

Learning after this event would suggest that a larger number of short scoping/planning meetings (where goal, scope and attendance are actively iterated a number of times, with full attendance of relevant staff at these) would be the best way to ensure appropriate and well prepared staffing.

Resourcing

Direct costs for such events are comparatively small, but, worth consideration. Catering enabled the event to proceed at pace, and there were requirements for stationary and in-room technology. Well-equipped, flexible, and pleasant meeting spaces are key to success of such events.

Time

Time dedicated to the event has been consistently identified as critical, and for the facilitation team significant time investment (often not visible to participants) is needed to organise, deliver and facilitate the Hot House.

Maintaining pace is important, and should be a focus for future similar events.

For this event, finding two days in the calendar was a challenge, but, enabled the topics raised to be explored adequately. Indeed, one participant suggested:

Run the event externally with a night over to completely focus the effort and ensure everyone is there for the full duration.

Facilitation

Experienced facilitation is recognised by participants as important to enable best use of time. This is an area that as an organisation we have some experience in, and can grow. Working in a pair to facilitate a multi-day event supports successful outcomes. Feedback from one participant included:

I think Victoria and Steve did a great job facilitating a fairly challenging group of people around a fairly complex issue, to achieve a positive outcome.

Culture

From the outset, the event was designed to support university values in practice. The importance and impact of culture (by which we mean established patterns of behaviours) was underlined. In this a number of participants commented on increasingly positive working relationships:

I think the personnel will continue to work together more closely in everyday work, and a more joined up approach [...] has resulted from this process unquestionably.

Sight of leadership is important, and significant value was gained from involving senior staff during preparation and as the Hot House approach developed.

It was good to know this process was endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team

Recommendations

The University would benefit from taking a similar approach to future activity, bearing in mind the learning above.

The authors recommend that this document is shared freely, to support further discussion, and would welcome discussing the experience of the event in more detail with colleagues.

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Appendix: Workshop Schedule

Pre-workshop

Two meetings were held with participants prior to those dates to clarify purpose and help ensure awareness of COCIS business. During these preparatory meetings goals were identified by participants and two external customers of COCIS. These goals were circulated to stakeholders for comment.

When asked to reflect on what could be done differently, relating to these early stages, one respondent indicated:

We maybe needed to more clearly outline the context at the beginning so everybody was roughly on the same page. I think some people had a different understanding of what we were meant to achieve.

Commitments from participants in the two preparatory sessions included:

- Preparation of one PowerPoint slide to illustrate any data needed to share at the start of the Hot House.
- Collaborative working to deliver continuous improvement and a customer focus (external and internal customer requirements).

2 Day Workshop

The Hot House involved two days of intensive workshops to generate options, problem solve and create outputs.

It had been intended to undertake some practical work to progress options however during the first morning of its work the Hot House participants chose to process map the "Napierised" slide below.

In consequence there was insufficient time to undertake practical activities to advance process improvement during the workshop.

The advantage of this process mapping however, was that the group had a much better shared understanding and thus better position to ensure effective future activity.

Nine core participants however two unable to come to day one so colleagues sent in their stead with the task of briefing the core members ready to participate in day two.

The Hot House was held on the 30 June and 1 July 2016.

Both days scheduled to run 9am-5pm however both days ended earlier as some participants had other commitments that meant they could not remain until 5pm as originally intended.

30 June 2016

Check in at 9.10 used to capture out puts each participant sought.

Presentations

Given by each participant and were followed by discussion. In addition Dr Logie presented on his DBA findings. Four participants had prepared presentations. The remaining either illustrated presentation through flow diagram on flip chart or in verbal update. Presentations generated much discussion including on risk tolerance levels in the University. Presentations ended 11.45.

Group discussion

On next steps. As facilitators our suggestion to the group was that given the preparation work done, presentations heard and discussion had we should undertake a group exercise to generate an explosion of ideas before lunch and thereafter move to exploration and evaluation of these ideas.

This would allow us to evaluate the options and identify the preferred ones. This suggestion generated much discussion among all the group. Following this discussion the group agreement reached was to process map the *Napierised* diagram that Dr R Hairstans had presented to the group that morning to ensure that all the group had a shared understanding of it.

Although the group were keen to remain as one to undertake the mapping, through discussion they appreciated that time precluded this and so they self-selected who best to go in each group (in doing so they were careful to spilt the work to ensure functional expertise could be utilised and that a customer of the process on the *Napierised* slide were in each group. Each process map included balloons and anchors, indicating enhancing and restraining factors, respectively.



Illustrating process steps (large post its) enhancing factors placed above the process steps, and restraining factors below

Lunch 12:15 – 13:15.

13:15 process mapping commenced after lunch.

The group had coffee while reviewing the process maps created by the other group. There was a chance for everyone to ask questions to check their understanding of what was displayed.

The group reconvened to create a rich picture – a depiction of how want the improvement to be/ what good would look like. The logic of doing so was to then use that rich picture to generate ideas about how to get there.



Photograph of diagram representing possible future organisation of research areas

Check out 4.30pm.

Each team member invited to share their reflections on the day, to enable adjustments for the following day.

1 July 2016

Check in used to gather any thoughts from overnight. Outline of plan for the day.

Individual and silent exercise: review material in the rooms. Think about what like to be at the university and to use creative thinking to come up with options of things that could be done to make things better and get to the rich picture position. Everyone was encouraged to include the radical. When finished the group silently put suggestions on the wall. Participants then individually and silently reviewed options and on post it notes ask any questions/ make further suggestions arising from their reading

Coffee

The remaining day was undertaken as a group. First activity was to de duplicate the options on the wall. The group did so through functional groupings such as RIO, finance etc. The group then moved to, without judgement, cluster within predetermined categories (within participants control; needs more investigation; university control and never going to happen).

Break for lunch.

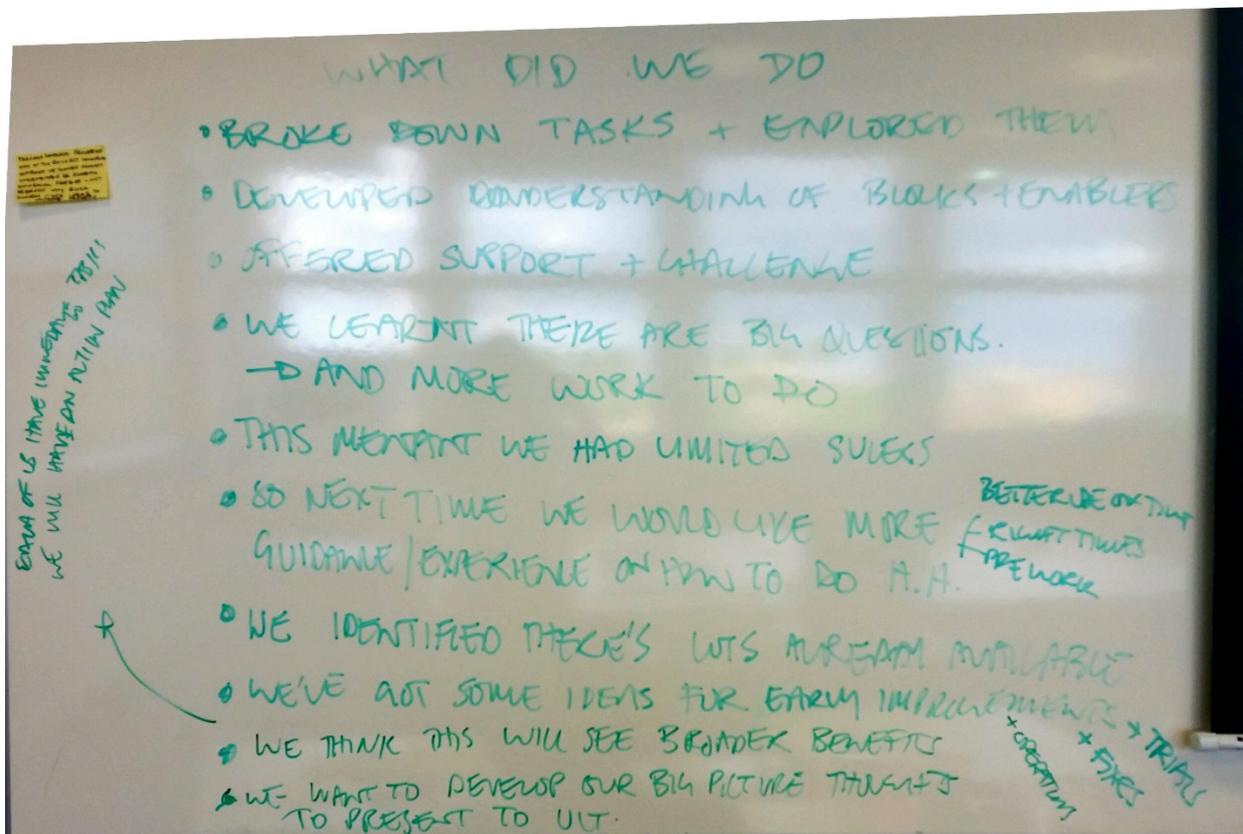
The group finished clustering the options as above. They then undertook a prioritisation exercise of the possible options (aside from "never going to happen" one).



Example of completed options analysis

Over coffee the group discussed what individuals could do to help realise top rated priority options.

Communications agreed (see <https://staffworkplace.napier.ac.uk/Services/s3/S3E/COCIS-HH/default.aspx>)



Whiteboard note of key agreed communication points

Check out

Post-workshop

Follow up sessions organised (4, 8 and 16 weeks post) to ensure progression of work as needed.

Team members took responsibility for completing actions and feeding back to these meetings as appropriate.

Stakeholders were regularly updated

This case study has been completed after the 16 week post event review, in order to enable participants to reflect on the experience and the difference it has made over the medium term.

Appendix: Participant List

Person	Job Title	Proposed HH Role
Steve Yorkstone	Senior Consultant, Information Services	Facilitator
Victoria Heathwood	School Support Enhancement Lead	Organisation, coordination, record output and liaison with A Ogilvie
Robert Hairstans	Head of COCIS	Present COCIS requirements
Julia Dawson	School Support Manager, SEBE	Bring knowledge of specialist area [admin support and having supported similar events elsewhere], understand issues before HH, have enough information and understanding to make decisions at HH (noting this may include discussions with other colleagues).
Janette Stone	Client Partner, Human Resources	Bring knowledge of specialist area [HR], understand issues before HH, have enough information and understanding to make decisions at HH (noting this may include discussions with other colleagues).
Gavin Davies	Contracts Manager, Research and Innovation Office	Bring knowledge of specialist area [research contracts], understand issues before HH, have enough information and understanding to make decisions at HH (noting this may include discussions with other colleagues).
E Dalley	Management Accountant – Projects, Finance	Bring knowledge of specialist area [finance], understand issues before HH, have enough information and understanding to make decisions at HH (noting this may include discussions with other colleagues).
Nick Fanin	Head of Bright Red Triangle	To help ensure scalability and that the outcomes can be shared.
Jamie Brogan	Professional Development Leader, Edinburgh Institute	To help ensure scalability and that the outcomes can be shared.
Lucille Bluefield	Senior Development Executive Individual	Bring knowledge of specialist area [fundraising], understand issues before HH, have enough information and understanding to make decisions at HH (noting this may include discussions with other colleagues).

Appendix: Qualitative Feedback

Opportunities

- The aim/purpose of the HH needs to be very clear and kept on track.
- I went in with the aim of how do we encourage commercialisation and it ended up being drawn into limitations of existing processes instead of trying to take a fresh look at things
- Perhaps have carried out the activity over a shorter time period
- I think there was too much representation at the meeting from 1 area of the University, which resulted in much of the discussions being dominated by the staff representing that area. This caused a 'blockage' in positive solution seeking discussions.
- Run the event externally with a night over to completely focus the effort and ensure everyone is there for the full duration.
- We maybe needed to more clearly outline the context at the beginning so everybody was roughly on the same page. I think some people had a different understanding of what we were meant to achieve. We need some sort of Assumption Dump.
- Done more to come up with new solutions to change established processes which run across departments and to challenge why some processes are applied in all situations. We also could have spent more time on income growth rather than procedures.

Impacts:

- Not sure to be honest.....i hope the HR processes make it easier to recruit and resource but budget considerations also play a part in this
- I think the support is there and is available, and the departments who attended has offered various solutions to the challenges which should hopefully allow for a more simplistic approach
- I think the personnell will continue to work together more closely in everyday work, and a more joined up approach to fundraising between a research centre and ER&C has resulted from this process unquestionably.
- The actions following the Hot House will in the fullness of time enable a scalable approach to delivering research and commercial activities by tapping into a pool of available talent empowered by an entrepreneurial and global mind-set.

- Small incremental changes that may help things run smoother. They will happen in time but the system is still going to be something to be worked around.
- Immediately: Lasting relationships. People taking responsibility for actions. Clear points of contact. Longer term: Recognition that processes can be a barrier to our strategic objectives if applied and a desire to improve them.

Reasons for NPS:

- the HH was a great start to enabling change, perhaps its better to have a narrower remit to avoid going off in different directions
- Working with colleagues to form positive solutions is a good approach to business.
- Real tangible benefits are coming from the process.
- we need to work on problems collaboratively
- Approach good. More empowerment of department representatives would make a difference.

Strengths:

- Team working, frank discussions about what worked and what didnt.
- Feel everyone in the room genuinley did want to make positive progress.
- Although it should be noted that most people involved already had established relationships."
- I thought the discussions over the 2 days went reasonably well - we lost focus at some points and some participants must want to use the services available.
- The HotHouse was succesful in bringing together staff from various areas of the University, and helped to provide greater understanding between them of their respective roles to solve a University problem.
- Two focussed days of bringing the relevant departments together for to form a team. The process has create a good level of understanding between the relevant players in order to develop a collaborative approaching going forward.
- The hot house threw everybody in a room and asked them to sort things out. We don't do that enough. It opened dialogue and created new relationships and understanding.
- Bringing people together from across different departments with the time, space and licence to share and solve problems.

Free text:

- I think Victoria and Steve did a great job facilitating a fairly challenging group of people around a fairly complex issue, to achieve a positive outcome. It was good to know this process was endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team due to time commitment.
- The day and follow on activities have been well managed. People have taken ownership of certain areas and made progress. I think having this linked to ULT has made sure of this.
- We need to revisit the business development bit.
- Following on Point 2 ... we've made good progress with pragmatic workarounds of processes within specific departments, but could achieve more with a more holistic approach and empowerment to say 'we don't need to follow that process' when appropriate.

Appendix: Purpose of this document

This case study is the record of activity undertaken during the COCIS (Centre for Offsite Constriction and Innovative Structures) Hot House in summer 2016. In this we focus on the background to this work, the activity actually undertaken, outcomes and the difference using the Hot House approach made.

This paper is taken from notes made on the day by facilitators and records of communication to senior stakeholders. It is informed by anonymous feedback from participants with representative quotes included. Full feedback can be found as an appendix

A record of this work can be accessed on [SharePoint](#) (for user access contact v.heathwood@napier.ac.uk). This includes a photographic record of outputs from the Hot House, and all 98 options generated with their analysis, alongside actions undertaken, updates on these, and a record of benefits.

This report is intended to inform lessons learn in order to support future events. This case study may be shared internally or externally. It is indented that this document will reinforce outcomes.