LEVERAGING INTERIM MANAGEMENT TO NAVIGATE TRANSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY CLAIRE CARTER

For the Higher Education sector, change is inevitable. Whether it's a change in leadership following the arrival of a new Vice Chancellor, a restructure amid a drive for efficiencies, a change in curriculum due to regulatory conditions or other pivotal moments in a university's' lifecycle, these transitions can be challenging to navigate. One strategic approach gaining prominence in such scenarios is the use of interim management.

Beyond crisis management: a proactive strategy

Interim management is often associated with crisis situations, but its applications extend far beyond firefighting. Universities are recognising the value of interim managers in proactively steering through change and transformation. Leadership gaps, mergers, planned change programmes, and other significant shifts present unique challenges that require a steady hand and strategic vision, typically one that remains unburdened by the routine demands of the day-to-day operations.

Interim managers bring more than just temporary stability; they provide a strategic compass during these transitions. By swiftly adapting to the universities ethos and leveraging their wealth of experience - often across many universities, interim leaders ensure that the trajectory of academic excellence remains unbroken.

Case in point: the success of interim leadership

Consider the case of a UK university, strategically navigating two key leadership transitions within the Marketing, Student Recruitment & Admission directorate while facing the formidable challenge of meeting student enrolment targets. Amidst low team morale, a lack of leadership, and dwindling conversion rates, the university embraced a forward-thinking approach by appointing an interim manager with a proven track record in transforming admission functions.

By bringing in an interim manager with a track record of successfully leading admissions teams through similar shifts, this university not only improved operational efficiency but also capitalised on new processes and revitalised applicant communications. The result? A university poised for a substantial upswing in conversion rates, setting the stage for a positive trajectory towards achieving its student enrolment targets.

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The takeaway: a forward-thinking approach
Interim management, traditionally seen as a reactive measure, is evolving into a forward-thinking strategy for universities undergoing transitions. By strategically deploying interim managers during these pivotal moments, universities can not only weather the storm but emerge stronger, more adaptable, and better positioned for future success.

Embracing interim management as a proactive choice during transitions is a strategic move that empowers university leaders to turn challenges into opportunities, ensuring a smooth sail through the ever-changing tides of higher education.

Claire has supported the public sector for over 20 years, providing interim and consultancy solutions to universities, housing associations, local authorities and the NHS. Her speciality is connecting her clients with flexible talent that can help deliver sustainable change, shaping organisations for the future and improving financial and operational outcomes. Claire has built an impressive track record with public sector leaders and helped many organisations identify the right solution in time-critical situations.

Claire also has a passion for providing careers advice and guidance to individuals, especially to those who have not previously considered an interim career before, but whom have unique insights and skills to offer the interim market. Claire joined Anderson Quigley in December 2021 to focus on supporting higher education, healthcare and social housing with senior interim managers and consultancy solutions.

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