1. The advent of accelerated degrees has not been warmly received by many in the UK Higher Education sector. Objections range from the economic (it will reduce University funding), to the educational (it reduces the time for students to reflect and develop), to the operational (institutions are not set up to deliver this model and academics will not have time to undertake research).

2. Whilst these perspectives undoubtedly have some validity, they should be set against the context of higher student fees (and interest on the loans) and increased expectation from students and their future employers for their educational investment to have a direct and positive payback. The argument that Higher Education is, in some way, a ‘different’ purchasing proposition to other major purchases is a fallacy in most students’ minds. Diversity, value for money and choice is inherent in every market and so it should be for Higher Education.

3. The Edge Hotel School was created in 2012 to deliver accelerated degrees in Hotel Management which not only required students to complete the (conventionally three year) academic qualification in two years but also to involve students in the running of a fully commercial, 4 star country house hotel, the Wivenhoe House Hotel.

4. Students are involved in every aspect of the operation and management of the hotel and, in their final level, undertake duty management roles effectively running the hotel and dealing with customers, many of whom have no idea that the hotel is an educational institution.

5. Concurrent with this they are undergraduates, attending lectures, seminars and workshops and reading for a University of Essex validated degree. There is no reduction in academic contact time due to the accelerated nature of the degree. There is no reduction in the academic
rigor of the content or standards. There is no concession to the shorter ‘personal development’ time.

6. On the contrary, many students recognise the intensive nature of the experience and perceive it to be excellent preparation for their future careers. They understand the need to develop real time management and prioritisation skills. They work in an intensive and focused way, whilst still engaging in normal undergraduate life and this is evidenced by the 88% satisfaction rating and the 94% employability NSS outcomes…and of course the smaller loans that they carry upon graduation.

7. In delivering these positive outcomes, the most significant barrier that has been encountered has been the outdated ‘traditional’ perceptions of many parents, teachers and influencers that ‘shorter’ or ‘cheaper’ is in some way inferior. In our approach, ‘shorter’ provides greater challenge for students and ‘cheaper’ is merely a manifestation of efficiency which benefits both the students as well as the organisation.

8. We acknowledge that two year accelerated degrees may not be appropriate for all subjects and may not fit everyone’s vision of student life, but we would invite anyone who questions this approach to visit us to see an example of best practice in action.

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