Engaging hearts and minds
Engaging with academics in the use of technology enhanced learning
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Introduction

About this guide

We’ve all heard comments like “We put on great courses – and can’t fill them!”, “Teaching is always going to take second place to research for academics” and “Academics just don’t have time to attend our courses”. So, how can we reach out to academics and persuade them to devote time and effort to enhancing their teaching through technology? What works? And what is scalable/affordable?

This Best Practice Guide has been put together by the UCISA Academic Support Group to provide examples of good practice in engaging academics, and other staff, in the use of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL).

The Guide contains 10 case studies which look at a variety of methods for engaging academics such as:

- setting up communities of practice
- developing intensive training and support programmes
- incorporating TEL into Postgraduate Certificate courses
- encouraging academics to publish their research in TEL

Each case study describes the activity and the approach taken, provides an evaluation of the activity and discusses future developments and transferability.

We hope you enjoy reading the case studies and find ideas that can be applied in your own institution. If you have any comments regarding the Best Practice Guide please contact Sue Fells at admin@ucisa.ac.uk.

Acknowledgements

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Teaching and Learning Conversations (TLC): flexible bitesize staff development by, with and for academics

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Abstract

This case study presents the new blended Teaching and Learning Conversations (TLC) programme offered by the Academic Development Unit (ADU) at the University of Salford. The TLC programme is an informal academic development intervention that helps individuals to connect with others from across the University and share good practice. Campus spaces as well as web conferencing technologies are used to provide more flexible and versatile provision in collaboration with academics and other professionals who support learning and at the same time model the use of such technologies for teaching and learning.

Description and context

Academic Development Units play an increasingly important role in initial and continuing professional development within higher education and have “moved to central stage in institutional priorities” (Boud, 1995, 203) offering a range of accredited and non-accredited provision.

The ADU's face to face open workshop programme attracts a relatively small number of usually the same individuals. The ADU's staff development approach was, therefore, readdressed to utilise available resources and create alternative opportunities to engage a larger number of staff in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). A variety of approaches is currently considered, such as subject specific CPD at School and programme level tailored to local needs. Blended provision is included for more flexibility (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007), incorporating self study resources and the development of toolkits accessible at any time. Opportunities to engage in peer observations and reviews are also explored. Donnelly (2010) noted that technologies are currently still under used in Academic Development, despite having the potential to enable academics to experience this mode of teaching as students and model good practice in the Digital Age. The ADU recognises this potential to transform teaching and learning, and promotes it as an enabler based on a pedagogical rationale.

Shortly after successfully piloting online synchronous delivery through Elluminate (web conferencing technology) as part of the blended Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP), the idea of the TLC programme was born. The aim of the TLC programme is to encourage more staff across the university to engage in flexible bitesize CPD activities which fit around academic life and explore teaching and learning at the University. It also provides an opportunity to meet like minded people and share ideas and challenges; to showcase work and identify opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other in communities of practice (Wenger, 2006); to enhance their own practice and the student experience as a result as well as the overall quality of teaching within the institution.

This study reports on the implementation of the TLC programme, series 1, with a focus on the online dimension, during which Elluminate is utilised as a medium to support media synchronicity (Dennis & Valacich, 1999) for more informal academic development activities, and aims to raise the quality of teaching and transforming learning which is the Strategic Goal 1 of the institution. The initiative was led by an Academic Developer who had the support of an Administrator and a Learning Technologist. It ran between February and June 2011, and consisted of monthly one hour lunchtime face to face sessions and evening webinars. The campus based sessions were organised in different locations and an Elluminate room was used for the webinars. All materials and recorded webinars were made available to all staff on the ADU website. Each TLC event had a teaching and learning theme defined by the interests and expertise of the facilitators.

Evaluation and impact

Overall, the TLC programme was well received and attended. It enabled flexible participation and facilitation from the academic community in different physical and virtual spaces and everybody found it useful, as feedback suggests. Also, the length of the TLC session, one hour, seems to be just right and enabled focused conversations and exchange. The webinars, in particular, enabled staff to experience web conferencing as a participant and facilitator before using it with their own students. This was beneficial. One participant said, for example “It was interesting to see the technology in action, and to get some idea of its possibilities and limitations”. Generally, staff were interested in...
using this technology in their own teaching. This is encouraging and confirms that the modelling of the technology was effective and made them reflect on their own practice. Elluminate enabled a more natural online interaction and spontaneity between participants and facilitators, as highlighted by Kear (2011). Participants were enthused. One noted “What a great session. I love it!! We need to spread the word”. Another one commented “I love Elluminate – can we roll it out across the whole University please – I love it!!” Most facilitators enjoyed it too. One of them stated “I found delivering a TLC webinar very useful to get views from many people and to be able to record them to listen and read later”. But participants also commented that the TLC sessions enabled them to share experiences and good practice with colleagues.

In total, 72 staff participated in all events (face to face sessions – 24/per session, 8; webinars – 48/per session, 16). While this might still appear to be a relative small number, increased traffic to the TLC section of the ADU website, where all materials are made available, has been observed suggesting further individuals engaged with some of the resources. Also, closer relationships have arisen between the ADU and the academic community, and there is evidence that academics are keen to engage and lead staff development activities to share their expertise, learn more about technology enhanced learning and teaching approaches and explore opportunities to enhance their practice and the student experience.

The results of this initiative are very encouraging. There are already plans to widen the offer and seek further internal and external partners to deliver a larger scale initiative. An investigation linked to the use of an open access web conferencing tool is also under way to identify if it would become a more sustainable solution for university wide web conferencing implementation.

Academic Development activities have a ripple effect and a small intervention can generate a more significant impact if it triggers rethinking of practices and transformational change (Mezirow, 1997). To measure the wider impact it will be essential not only to look at the numbers of academics who participated in the TLC initiatives but more importantly focus on how their engagement in such activities is influencing and changing their practice and the student experience as a result.

Problems encountered and lessons learnt

A number of issues, mainly linked to the webinars, were identified:

- **Timing** – offering the webinars during evening hours seemed generally unpopular. Only one participant commented positively, saying “I really enjoyed being able to connect with colleagues outside of office hours”. Due to limited popularity, future TLC sessions will be offered during the day.

- **Administration** – planning of all TLC sessions was time consuming and inefficient. Google Docs is now used to enable self registration for facilitators, making this process more manageable.

- **Support** – offering webinars without technical support was risky. However, only minor issues were encountered. Collaboration with a learning technologist has been secured for the next TLC series and the timing of the webinars during working hours will also provide enhanced support.

- **Facilitation** – while most facilitators enjoyed the webinars, a small number felt uncomfortable. Further staff development is planned in advance of a webinar and face to face sessions to provide guidance and advice.

- **Participation** – overall interaction and participation was good. Some avoided using the microphone during the webinars. Further opportunities for anonymous participation using the whiteboard feature need to be explored.

- **Technology** – there were some issues with the technology beyond our control, such as a power cut and the inability to use Elluminate from a mobile device or an Apple Mac. The most common problem was audio (“I couldn’t hear” and “my microphone doesn’t work”).

- **Frustration** – a small number of participants felt they needed more time to respond or found the technology and mode of delivery frustrating. One webinar facilitator noted “Some good aspects but I found it hard to keep up with the texts coming in at the end and shame people could not use the mic more. Too much of me talking and without people taking the mic there’s a limit to the value of it being mainly messaging”. This was echoed in a participant’s feedback “Too many things going on at once”. Participants and facilitators need to be reminded of the available resources, as well as training and staff development opportunities available to them to gain a better understanding of this mode of delivery.
Future developments

The blended TLC programme has been positively received and, increasingly, the ADU is contacted by academics keen to facilitate and participate in a TLC event. There is an increasing sense of shared ownership of this initiative which has strengthened our plans to continue offering the TLC programme in the next academic year and refine the approach further, aiming to create learning partnerships and communities of practice (Wenger, 2006).

The following changes are planned for the next academic year in response to feedback received and own evaluation:

- The TLC offer has been extended by 100% per month.
- All sessions will continue to be offered on Wednesdays. New timing for all sessions is 12–1pm, including the webinars.
- Facilitators are invited from within Salford. External colleagues are also welcome to participate and facilitate, strengthening links between external partners.
- Staff not able to participate synchronously in the TLC Wednesday sessions, face to face or online, will have the opportunity to catch up on Twitter asynchronously using a hashtag (#tlcwednesday).
- An opportunity to use more video has been identified and the organisers are rethinking their approach to the format of the webinars.
- TLC materials used will be made available as OER under a Creative Commons Licence on the ADU website, the institutional repository USIR and JORUM to enable reuse, remix, repurposing and redistributing and sharing with the wider community.
- The ADU is piloting Blackboard Collaborate 11, a new product which emerged from the merger of Wimba and Elluminate. The blended TLC approach is used to model technology enhanced teaching and learning and web conferencing tools to provide food for thought to academics.
- The TLC space on the ADU website is currently under review. The new page will include further self study resources and troubleshooting guides especially for the use of Blackboard Collaborate 11.
- An alternative web conferencing tool BigBlueButton will be trialled for some of the TLC webinars as part of the Elluminate evaluation which might present a more sustainable solution for the institution.
- Resources from TLC series 1 are archived on the ADU website and will remain available to everybody.
- A TLC facilitator development session is planned in advance of every TLC session to help facilitators familiarise themselves with the TLC programme and provide advice on how to plan and deliver highly interactive face to face sessions and webinars.
- TLC events will be mapped against the UK PSF and e-certificates of participation. Facilitation will be provided to evidence engagement with CPD activities.

We are interested in finding partner institutions to develop a TLC database which will enable HE institutions across the UK to gain access to CPD provision at another institution, maximising engagement and creating opportunities for networking and collaboration beyond institutional walls through sharing available resources and expertise.

Externally, the attractiveness of the TLC approach has already been recognised a few months after the initial implementation by the Academic Development Unit of the University of Salford. The TLC approach was shared with other institutions during a CPD Framework meeting at the Higher Education Academy in which the ADU participated. As a result, it was recently announced that the TLC approach has been introduced at Sheffield Hallam University and the University of the West of Scotland for their staff development and proven to be popular there as well. Other institutions have also shown interest when the TLC programme was presented during a Thunderstorm session at the Media Enhanced Learning Special Interest Group (MEL SIG) event held at the University of Glamorgan in June 2011.

The current case study will be made available within the Institutional Repository USIR to disseminate findings and engage academics further in a dialogue about this initiative. Additional opportunities to participate in other dissemination workshops and events within and beyond the institution are currently explored; and further research will be conducted in the next academic year, linked to the online dimension of the TLC programme and the wider use of web conferencing technologies for teaching and learning as part of an institution evaluation led by the ADU.
**Transferability**

The approach used for the blended TLC programme is transferable and such schemes can be set up easily in similar contexts as evidenced above. The TLC approach could also be adapted and used in different teaching and learning situations with students: for example, to deliver peer to peer academic study skills workshops and engage students across an institution or a specific School, discipline, programme or module. The opportunities are endless.

The following might be useful to consider before the implementation of similar schemes:

- **Mode and location** – try and arrange the face to face sessions around the campus. Pick a different location each time to attract different individuals and teams.

- **The tool** – check if the institution holds a licence for a web conferencing tool and get in touch with the relevant service to obtain advice and guidance on how to access it and get started. Familiarisation with the technologies in advance of the implementation is vital. If no such tool is available, similar open access technologies such as BigBlueButton could be considered. JISC provide a BigBlueButton installation, see the [JISC website](http://www.jisc.ac.uk) for more information.

- **Staff development** – it will be important to gain a good understanding of how web conferencing tools can be used and how they can enhance teaching and learning, and develop a pedagogical rationale for using them. Making self study guides and tutorials available online and offering one to one support in advance of facilitation will be beneficial, for the face to face and online sessions.

- **Support** – it will be vital to gain the support of IT Services, Learning Technologists and Academic Developers who will all help the smooth operation of such initiatives.

- **Resources** – making materials and recorded webinars freely available would enable others who missed a session to access these afterwards.

- **Offer** – start small! Run a pilot and see how it goes. Do not dictate themes. Let the facilitators decide. Get feedback, evaluate and refine your approach before you continue. Remember that it is about bringing people together, sharing experiences and learning with and from each other. Help facilitators to understand how this could happen in face to face and online settings.

- **Collaboration** – consider developing similar schemes in collaboration with colleagues from own and other institutions to share resources and expertise and expand the overall offer.

Palmer (2007, 148) stresses that “we must spend more time talking to each other about teaching”. The TLC creates flexible bitesize opportunities to make this happen utilising available technologies.

Please get in touch if you require further information or are interested in the development of a multi institutional TLC model.

**References**


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2 The Friday Fry-Up

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Abstract

The Friday Fry-Up (the Fry) has become a regular monthly highlight for staff involved in teaching and supporting learning at the University of Dundee. Developed and supported by a collaborative partnership between an academic and Educational Development, the Fry provides a relaxed and informal but also educationally stimulating forum to discuss technology enhanced learning initiatives. Central to the success of the venture is the peer led approach to sharing practice.

Description and context

You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. This old adage can prove frustratingly correct in relation to engaging academics with educational development, particularly with regard to technology enhanced learning (TEL). Development and training in TEL can often be viewed as the preserve of individual enthusiasts or those with time on their hands with which to play about with new technologies. This attitude often results in a frustrating disconnect between new ideas and innovations in TEL and actual changes to practice and benefits for student learning.

The answer, however, can be to change tack, rather than try to make traditional approaches work. While a centrally delivered approach to educational development in TEL does work on some levels, e.g. our over subscribed workshops on web conferencing, this is often as a result of real need (in the case of web conferencing for increased levels of engagement and interaction in distance learning programmes) rather than general interest. We wanted to be able to move colleagues’ attention away from learning about TEL just as a requirement for their teaching and learning practice and into an exploration of new technologies as a way of stimulating ideas and enthusiasm in this area.

Furthermore, we knew that a significant amount of good practice in this area already existed and although this was being shared and disseminated via other educational development avenues, such as the University’s Highlighter newsletter, what was missing was the critical engagement from the practitioner community. The joint venture, between an enthusiastic academic (Lynn Boyle) and Educational Development (led by Lorraine Walsh), outlined in this case study reflects a distinctive and purposeful move away from top down interventions (typified by traditional approaches to educational development) towards practitioner led, evidence informed and bitesized approaches (reflecting academic empowerment and ownership) to the enhancement of pedagogic practice. Our first change was to ensure that this new approach was clearly branded as practitioner led. The second was to use the knowledge, experience and questions of the academics themselves as the vehicle for engagement. And the third was to provide a convivial environment, reflecting the ambience of a long lost staff club.

In recent years, there had been no informal forum within the University of Dundee to share and discuss issues in current practice, and ideas for new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This had been the result of a number of factors including lack of available dedicated space, resource for such an initiative and also a reluctance by staff to support existing facilities such as the staff dining club and staff development initiatives such as the Forum for the Enhancement of Learning & Teaching (FELT). This led to the closure of the admittedly very formal staff dining club and the fading away of FELT, following the departure of the member of staff who had led it. These centrally led facilities and opportunities were clearly not what was needed or wanted by 21st century teachers and other colleagues supporting learning. Nonetheless, the absence of a forum was keenly felt and had led to a feeling amongst some colleagues of falling behind in their pedagogical knowledge currency. The response to this situation was the creation of the Friday Fry-up club. The idea of a traditional fry up is different to many people. The main ingredients may remain the same but additional items can be included, and it is largely regarded as a treat. This idea resonated with the idea of a staff club with each person being an ancillary ingredient bringing new ideas to each meeting where a core theme of sharing of ideas and a chance to meet over lunch in a dedicated environment would represent the treat.

Space has been made available at no cost by the Library & Learning Centre (LLC) through their EduZone, a dedicated, informal space for educational development with comfy sofas, AV equipment, and resources — and conveniently co-located next to the LLC café. Meetings are held at lunchtime and participants are encouraged to bring their lunch while the LLC provides tea and buns — a cost absorbed by the central educational development budget. A mailing list of interested individuals is maintained by Lynn and advance notice of meetings is circulated via email and the University’s weekly e-newsletter, Hermes, as well as through the usual channels employed by Educational Development, including the website, plasma information screens, Highlighter newsletter etc. Recruits to lead the meetings, with a brief ten minute introduction, are sourced by both Lynn and Lorraine and other colleagues from their networks and contacts across the University. As a result, administration is minimal and the small costs are absorbed by existing budgets, therefore, resource implications are small and manageable.
Evaluation and impact

Since its inception in 2009, there has been one meeting of the Fry each month during the academic year, attended by approximately 200 colleagues in total, from 12 different Schools and Colleges across the University including Deans and administrative staff. While the numbers at each meeting are relatively small, between 15–20 individuals on average, a different group of colleagues tends to engage with each session. The small numbers are required in order to maintain the effectiveness of the sharing and discussion elements which are core to the success of the Fry. Furthermore, years of experience in educational development have demonstrated that the quality of participants, in terms of levels of enthusiasm, interest and engagement can result in a more significant impact on changing practice than quantity of participants at any given event.

Each meeting has had a different theme or presenter, identified in response to the experiences and teaching practices from club members. Topics have included:

- using screen casting tools such as JING® for effective feedback and online instruction
- tag clouds
- Box of Broadcasts
- accessibility
- online tutoring
- The Digital Pen is Mightier than the Sword
- speed meet to engage with other members

This model reflects the concept of a community of practitioners which has not been manufactured but has developed organically, giving it a much better sense of ownership, and reinforcing the argument that institutional statements and policies cannot communicate information literacies, but that people do (Terrence, 2006).

Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that engagement with the new technologies has been positive and work is ongoing to evaluate longer term take up and impact on the student learning experience. While attribution of cause and effect to the introduction of specific technologies remains challenging, a variety of methods are being employed in order to collect this information, including focus group discussions with participants and specific questions in the annual staff e-learning survey.

Problems encountered and lessons learnt

Problems have been limited to niggles, and can perhaps be better described as challenges; for example, the time of day when the meeting is held and which day of the week people can attend the club. However, the changing and diverse group of attendees that attend the Fry has negated any real issues. The day and time will always be exclusive to some people but retaining the last Friday of every month as the meeting date ensures that diaries do not have to be planned for each event. Apart for this, organisational issues have not been in evidence, due to the commitment from the academic and educational development organisers, dedicated venue in the EduZone, and a small but guaranteed budget to meet the cost of refreshments.
The continuing popularity of the Fry has proved that this kind of model of educational development is a popular and thus a successful one, by engaging staff, ensuring a regular attendance and reaching a varied audience. It meets a need from staff in relation to their development needs, both in terms of opportunities to discuss and share and also to learn more about small scale TEL implementations that have worked from colleagues and could work for them.

**Future developments**

Despite its informality, and the success of this approach, effective planning for the future development and sustainability of the Fry are crucial to its continuing success. Any future developments will need to continue to address the issues and topics with which colleagues want to engage, and to ensure the continuation of the sense of fun and ownership around this approach to CPD. The future of the club depends, therefore, on two elements: ensuring the planning of the topics to be discussed so that they are of genuine interest and have been used by others successfully in their teaching or research, and are therefore evidence based, and also ensuring that the club remains diverse in its membership and not a closed club for the enthusiastic innovators. Publicity is key to reaching new members, as are other ideas such as bring a friend events. The sense of fun and treat must be retained as this has been the essence of the club’s success. Club badges and gifts for presenters based on childhood nostalgia for club membership have been discussed and funding for these and other marketing devices is being sought.

**Transferability**

Transferability of this model of continuing professional development (CPD) relies on enthusiastic participants and joint working between support staff, development teams and lecturers. The idea of ownership of the club must be reliant on the membership and will only succeed if it is not institutionalised. The club model could work in any professional setting where a comfortable space and a little hospitality can be offered. There is very little organisation required to manage the club, and the time factor has little impact on workload, although commitment and enthusiasm from both the organisers, contributors and participants is key to ongoing success. Thus, it is important to ensure this form of CPD remains and is viewed as a fun and enjoyable, as well as a worthwhile, activity and not an institutional requirement. Dobbins (2009) describes innovation as a conversation where people can exchange feelings and descriptions to suit the listener or audience which cannot always be conveyed in print. The successful format of the Fry has provided a space where conversation is valued; an opportunity to engage experienced staff alongside new colleagues; a focus for inter professional learning; and a platform for increased practitioner engagement with development activities.

**References**


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3 The Learning Studio

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Abstract

“Sharing tacit knowledge requires interaction and informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching and apprenticeship of the kind that communities of practice provide”. (Wenger et al. 2002, p9)

The Learning Studio is conceived as a space for colleagues to explore, experiment and collaborate in the domain of technology enhanced teaching and learning, by using a Community of Practice (CoP) approach. It was developed over the last year by a small group of staff at the University of the Arts London (UAL), led by Paul Lowe, and supported by the University’s Centre for Teaching and Learning in Art and Design (CLTAD). This case study will detail how the Learning Studio has developed in the six months since its inception.

The cultivation of the Learning Studio community

“Knowledge is no longer acquired in a linear manner. We can no longer personally experience and acquire all the learning that we need in order to act. We must derive our competence from forming connections with other people.” (Mason and Rennie 2008, p110)

The overarching purpose of the Learning Studio was to build capacity in technology enhanced learning within the institution. It was intended that the first year would be a trial of this approach to staff development, allowing staff to share experience and learning in a horizontal, non-hierarchical way. The vision was to create a space where staff would learn together, growing into a collaborative learning community based on their own professional practice. It was intended that virtual and face to face activities would be undertaken as directed by the community and that a plan for sustainability of the community past the trial period would be created.

A CoP (Communities of Practice) approach was used to develop and nurture the community (Wenger et al, 2002). In particular, we wanted an approach that was led by front line staff involved in teaching and that was organic and democratic. Wenger et al. (2002, p13) note that in nurturing such an environment, a light touch is needed in terms of setting the agenda for the community, and that “design and development are more about eliciting and fostering participation than planning, directing and organising their activities”. The intent was for the community to manifest its value in a sense of both producing something in common, and in engaging in interesting conversations. The interesting conversations would have a structure and focus with the community itself producing the agenda. As such, predicting the outcomes of such a community is difficult and possibly counterproductive for “some of [a CoP’s] greatest value lies in intangible outcomes, such as the relationships they build among people, the sense of belonging they create, the spirit of inquiry they generate, and the professional confidence and identity they confer to their members” (Wenger et al. 2002, p15). With this in mind, it is important to note that, beyond increasing engagement with learning technology, there was no central vision of what engagement may look like. It was important that this emerged and was fostered by the community and each member as it suited their needs and context.

Wenger et al. describes CoP as a “unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues, a community of people who care about this domain, and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (2002, p27). The domain was technology enhanced teaching and learning, the community was centred around core practitioners already involved in this domain with hopes of those not yet engaged taking part as the community developed, and the focus of the community was on real world experiences and practices (rather than theory). Central to this concept is that the community would have a low threshold to entry. We wanted to avoid being dominated by techies to ensure we encouraged legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Key features of this type of participation include being around those with more expertise, storytelling that enables the exchange of soft knowledge and developing and maintaining community of practice knowledge. (Lave and Wenger 1991; Kimble, Hildreth and Wright 2000):

As Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, all three elements, legitimation, peripherality and participation are necessary to further development of a professional identity. Managing relations between experts and new members is key to this process, and we have sought to remove barriers wherever possible by making the events very informal. As Wenger et al note,

“An expert will certainly have more power than a novice, but this power derives from the ability to contribute to the knowledge of the community, not from the formal authority to control, resources, give orders, or grant promotions”. (Wenger et al. 2009, p43)
The Learning Studio was conceived by Paul Lowe, Course Director of the Masters Programme in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography. Paul was supported in the form of a one day a week secondment to CLTAD to develop and act as the community coordinator for the Learning Studio. Given the financial climate in HE, the Learning Studio has been designed with a low resources impact using existing facilities and employing a creative approach to catering at the events (see below).

Learning Studio workshops

The heart of the community to date has been a series of bar camp style workshops, where staff demonstrate what they are using in their own teaching practice. The concept of Bar Camps emerged from the software development world, and is defined as an “ad hoc gathering born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment”, and as an “intense event with discussions, demos and interaction from participants who are the main actors of the event” (Bar Camp, 2011). The format is very informal with the session varying depending on who turns up on the day, creating a low level of barrier for new presenters and a space to talk about experimental ideas or work in progress as well as more finished presentations. This approach has created a non-threatening and fun atmosphere that encourages a sense of serious play as well as knowledge sharing and exchange.

For the Learning Studio workshops we typically have several pre-arranged presentations or demos, and then allow those who turn up a chance to share their practice too. Attendance has been between 10 and 30 people at each workshop. A core group of regular attendees has emerged, but we also get new people coming to each session. What has been particularly successful is that although most of the sessions have been held at the London College of Communication (LCC), one of the six colleges that make up UAL, we have attracted staff from all the other colleges as well. Even more encouraging is that attendees have been from a range of UAL departments (including the Library, Marketing and IT) and roles (including academics, technicians and administrators).

The workshops are usually held in a large open plan teaching area, with several flat screen monitors, projectors, and laptops available so that small clusters can form to present to each other in different parts of the room. We provide refreshments in the form of homemade muffins and cupcakes, jellybeans and ginger beer, in the light hearted sprit of Google and Bar Camp. Indeed, one of our most successful activities has been decorating cupcakes and videoing the process on small hand held video cameras as a way to demonstrate how to create a process led instructional multimedia resource.

In developing the community, we have followed Wenger’s Seven Principles (Wenger et al, 2002):

1. Design for evolution
2. Open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives
3. Invite different levels of participation
4. Develop both public and private community spaces
5. Focus in value
6. Combine familiarity and excitement
7. Create a rhythm for the community

These principles suggest that the community itself should have control of its own activities and personality, and that it should be as inclusive as possible. Again, the Bar Camp format has encouraged this sense of ownership and self determination for the Learning Studio. What we have found to be central to this process is allowing the community to find its own preferred method(s) of engagement. As noted above, we planned for a variety of activities both online and face to face, however, it is the real world bar camps that have become the key feature of the community to date. They have provided the ideal opportunity for new and established learning and teaching staff to meet each other and learn together. One of the CLTAD staff and a key member of the community, Lindsay Jordan, notes that:

“We thought we already knew the staff most interested in and using new technologies in learning and teaching, but this format appeared to attract more new faces than any other. Some of them had never shared their work with colleagues in this way before.”

Evaluation and impact

The sessions have generated good feedback, in keeping with the informality of the concept we have not used any formal feedback approach but have received emails, often unsolicited, in response to the sessions. One participant said that it was a “great way to meet other UAL staff. I think you hit the subject at the perfect angle, making it fun, short and varied”, while another found it to be “very inspiring and great to meet a lively bunch of colleagues! Great fun”. Another reply that really summed up the atmosphere was as follows:
“Thank you for organising the Podfest. It has been a great opportunity to share ideas, which for sure will make a difference in our way of working.

This is the best way to keep up to date and to make the right changes in our work. We need to backup constantly and be inspired to be able to teach students at a higher quality. The quality of our job depends also on how we are able to change and learn new tools which are available. It has been not just useful but also fun... so I hope to see more Podfests in future.”

The topics we have covered have been varied, ranging from hands on demos of using flip video cameras to detailed descriptions of projects like the collaboration on digital archiving with the Museum of London, to student led feedback on blogging. This variety of topics helps to maintain what Lombardozzi describes as an essential feature of learning technologists today, a “balancing act between knowing a little bit about a lot of the landscape and a lot about a little bit of the landscape” (2010).

Tony Pritchard of LCC and Ollie Furlong of LCF have been especially supportive in running the sessions, their enthusiasm and commitment has been invaluable. Ollie notes that the Learning Studio is:

“one of the best forum’s this University has got in terms of connecting with fellow UAL staff in friendly informal setting. It not only helps you find out what is going on in the University, but it also informs important decisions as to how to adopt or implement certain technologies. It is a forum for people who are keen and active to share knowledge concerning online collaborative technology, and bring that knowledge back to the colleges or departments they usually work in. It helps validate the work I do here at LCF, and I know my line managers see it as an important forum/group that facilitates my continuing professional development.”

For a flavour of the experience, see Ollie Furlong’s audition tape as a Blue Peter presenter and Lindsay Jordan explaining how to use Flip video cameras.

Other objectives

In the initial plan we wanted to develop a blog and a forum for debate using a UAL online tool that includes social networking functions called MyCPD. So far these initiatives have been less successful. The format and functions of a UAL hosted blog along with the need for a regular set of contributors to content have meant that we are looking instead to some form of RSS feed of established UAL bloggers. The myCPD tool currently has a low profile within UAL and, therefore, lacks active members to contribute to the discussions. Several forums have been started and have generated some useful discussion, but so far its application has been limited.

Overall, the success of the face to face workshops has been very encouraging. They have been established as an important space for peer learning and discussion across the institution. As myCPD matures and becomes more used it should become a more useful space for online discussion and peer to peer contact to further facilitate discussion, debate and learning within the community.

Future developments

As evidence above, the Learning Studio has proved a successful approach to staff development in the area of technology enhance learning that has required very little institutional cost and risk to undertake. We hope to continue this work with the following key areas of focus:

1. Expand Bar Camp style workshops with the possibility of bringing in external participants and hosting the workshops at other colleges. Our goal is to hold one Learning Studio workshop per month in rotating college locations.

2. Develop a stronger web presence perhaps by trialling an information stream/sharing platform like Tumblr or Posterous to allow staff to share their own blog posts as well as highlight other links of interest without requiring extensive central contribution or coordination.

3. Foster links with other CoPs such as our existing cohort of participants on our validated professional development programs (e.g. modules within our HEA accredited PGCert)

4. Continue to support community stewardship. While much of the activity of the Learning Studio has been designed to be self sustaining and driven by the community, it is important to note that without some central coordination communities often falter and fail to thrive. We are also considering fostering this formal stewardship role across all the colleges to spread the coordination load, achieve broader input and ensure longer term sustainability of the community. Continued support for the community co-coordinator is important in nurturing this.
Transferability

The Learning Studio has demonstrated internally that a CoP approach can be a very useful and successful approach to staff development, focusing on peer to peer engagement with real world practice. As such, the concept could easily be applied to other areas of the University’s activities. The Learning Studio itself is now planned to expand from learning technology into the broader area of pedagogy and teaching and learning.

Ideally, this kind of approach is most successful when it builds on the enthusiasms and commitment of an existing group of individuals rather than being imposed from above. Institutions wishing to emulate this approach would be advised to identify key staff members, who could be potential community coordinators and to support them to spend realistic amounts of time nurturing the community. The key to the success of the Learning Studio to date has been that it is led by active staff members involved at the coal face, and that it is not seen as a traditional training or staff development activity but rather as a grassroots level opportunity to interact with one’s peers in an informal, informative and entertaining environment.

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Adaptation for adoption – changing modes of staff development in higher education

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Abstract

This paper explores the reasons and rationale behind adapting the modes of delivery of the Blended Learning Unit’s staff development programme at the University of Wolverhampton. Responding to institutional and political change the unit demonstrated a reflexive and reactive attitude towards delivering an inclusive and engaging programme of blended learning sessions. Whilst this paper reflects on the past five years and modes of delivery that have been implemented, it also looks towards the future and ways in which the unit can continue to best serve the institution.

Introduction

At the University of Wolverhampton, the challenge of providing pedagogically sound, technology based staff development falls within the remit of the Blended Learning Unit. This paper explores the various transitions and changes to strategy and approaches that the unit has adopted in trying to engage staff in the University. Past and current models are discussed and future plans, due for implementation, are also explored.

The Blended Learning Unit (BLU) is based within the Institute for Learning Enhancement (ILE) and is a centrally located unit, dedicated to supporting and advising teaching staff to develop, integrate, embed and sustain blended learning practice within their Learning and Teaching (L&T). The BLU is supported by wider ILE expertise and is able to draw on a wealth of knowledge, research and experience in relation to curriculum design and strategy. The BLU not only feeds into this research, by drawing on L&T practices the team encounters and encourages but also acts as a conduit for sharing best practice and innovation across the university.

The five Blended Learning Unit Advisers have various roles, responsibilities and expertise and all act as a point of contact for specific Schools. This model has worked extremely well providing members of School staff with a continuity of service, also providing a gateway to other expertise within the BLU team.

Description and context

Following a review of the undergraduate portfolio, September 2010 saw the University of Wolverhampton launch a new curriculum for adoption by the institution. The ultimate aim of this programme, Learning Works: Refocusing the Curriculum being to better prepare students for graduation and the working world beyond. The focus on a modular structure of study allowed for more innovative teaching practice and provided academic staff with the opportunity to redesign and redevelop innovative approaches to the use of technology in their teaching and assessment practice with a strategy for blended learning.

This provided a major opportunity for the Institute of Learning Enhancement and the Blended Learning Unit to access discipline based module teams and to raise awareness and offer support and advice on how blended learning could be embedded within the new designs; this would use existing institutional technological platforms, embedding them within innovative curriculum development at a pivotal time for the institution. This had the added benefit of building up communication channels between Schools and the relatively new Blended Learning Unit which was formed in 2008. Whilst staff may have been aware of the unit’s formation, BLU was perceived by some staff as a central support unit with limited potential impact when redesigning and refocusing the curriculum; this was an opportunity to shift that perception.

The original staff development programmes consisted of a number of platform related sessions, i.e. VLE or e-portfolio. However, it quickly became apparent from internal evaluation that staff perceived attending a session as too generic and procedural and of little value to them. Consequently, training was redesigned as Building Blocks with an activity based learner centric focus, launched in early in 2009 (Figure 1) but, despite this redesign, session attendance was still varied.
Again the BLU had to radically rethink, altering its own approach to staff development. The team devised a menu of choices which aimed to address most staff circumstances, availability and workload at certain times of the year in order to further encourage them to take up the support and training on offer. The menu shows a variety of ways in which staff could attend sessions both face to face (f2f) and online (Figure 2).

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**Figure 1: Building blocks, learner centric focus, staff development programme**

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**Figure 2: The menu of choices staff development programme**
The attendance figures for these sessions were encouraging as we welcomed staff for whom BL was a new approach (though they were willing to engage) and colleagues that had traditionally been keen to further their practice. School management teams were positive about the change in approach and enthusiastic to promote the flexible programme of learning and teaching solutions to staff within their Schools. Unfortunately, the newly adapted programme did not capture those individuals that were still reluctant to revisit and adapt their learning and teaching.

In early 2010, recognising the importance and potential impact of the Learning Works developments, the BLU approached senior management teams to seek higher level buy in for their approach. The plan was to implement a whole team intervention, entitled Blended Learning Weeks specific to each academic School at the University. Its aim – to support and facilitate advancements in staff knowledge and expertise and assist with curriculum development.

These interventions saw the migration of all BLU members, based in each academic School, for a full working week, available all day for individual or academic team drop in sessions. During this period, BLU staff abandoned the normal model of each adviser acting as a point of contact for a specific School and instead advised as a team – pooling resources, knowledge and expertise for staff attending Blended Learning Week sessions.

The Schools took responsibility for arranging rooming and workload allocation for the meetings and for any future development work.

**Evaluation and impact**

The School of Art and Design (SAD) piloted the BL Week approach with approximately 30 staff attending sessions, and with representation from all courses, all divisions and both undergraduate and postgraduate awards. One of the main motivators to high attendance was the support and encouragement of the School's management team and newly appointed Blended Learning Director who, following on from the success of the BL Week, organised a School’s Blended Learning Festival, an event at which staff showcased best practice arising from the initial BL Week. Patricia Cooper, Associate Dean of The School of Art and Design, reported that:

“SAD staff embraced the creative opportunities for widening and developing their teaching practice with enthusiasm during the BL week, however, the real benefit for change has been in the sustained effort of all concerned throughout the year. BL aspirations have been identified as part of the School’s audit of modules and together with the efforts of the BL Director, the course e-Facilitators and the e-Technics team we have an exciting and boundary pushing agenda for the forthcoming academic session.” Cooper, P. (2011)

The high attendance levels and the subsequent (anecdotally) positive effect on staff development and student learning are testament to the success of the initiative. It has also, in part, helped inform and redefine School policy and staff roles to include and acknowledge the importance of technology enhanced learning. The BL Week was an integral part of the School plan to help raise awareness and understanding of blended learning and foster a culture of practice within the school. Long term intangible benefits that must not be underestimated, have been the continued impact on blended learning practices resulting from relationships built with staff who attended the initial sessions.

Other Schools also registered high uptake, specifically the University of Wolverhampton Business School, recording approximately 50 attendees across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. They also benefitted from active involvement of School senior management in the organisation of the BL Weeks.

Appreciating that different Schools have different working cultures, the BLU team recognised that the Business School required a different mode of dissemination from the School of Art and Design’s Blended Learning Festival, choosing instead a detailed showcase of good practice on the institutional VLE (Figure 3).
Some of the most unexpected and exciting outcomes that have evidenced the weight of change within the University and individual Schools have been:

- The staging of School BL Festivals, in which staff showcase innovative practice for adoption by others.
- The introduction of staff e-mentors, supporting the development of early adopters.
- The development of School specific BL strategies.
- Ongoing relationships which were initially built with staff during the BL Weeks.
- Building new relationships with other staff following the ripple effect of impact felt from the BL Weeks.

The continued engagement of staff already adopting blended approaches to learning and teaching and also the engagement of academics for whom blended learning is a new approach.

Problems encountered and lessons learnt

Some teaching staff were resistant to curriculum change and to the introduction of BL in particular. Although this resistance might have arisen from a reluctance to engage with institutional wide strategies, the team needed to show that BL could enhance current practices rather than replace what a tutor might be successfully doing already. Essentially, it was necessary to unpack definitions of BL. A common concern amongst staff was the presumption that BL would replace face to face sessions. However, this can only happen when a culture of trust is established between the BLU and the teaching staff concerned.

This trust and understanding helps to ensure that the tutor does not perceive BL initiatives as threats, as a dilution of the student experience, or as an institutionally driven money saving initiative. Typically, teaching staff had not considered how technology and, more specifically, a series of BL interventions, could enhance aspects of their modules other than the traditional delivery of information to their students. Suggesting that staff could move away from perceiving online environments simply as platforms for delivery (something akin to a digital lecture) went hand in hand with suggestions for tasks that their students might complete, both collaboratively and individually.
There were also some tutor concerns about sharing their current practice, for fear of inviting criticism of their identity as a subject specialist by colleagues or the wider community. Ensuring senior management buy in at an earlier stage would have made transitions smoother within the University. Consequently, attendance at BL Weeks in some Schools was poor. At the other end of the scale, some teaching staff who were already effectively using blended learning perceived our role as one of auditing practice rather than supporting innovation.

**Future developments and transferability**

The BL Week approach proved to be particularly appropriate during the time of transition in the Learning Works project as the changes to the undergraduate curriculum through the project affected the majority of teaching staff across the institution. This provided a unique opportunity for staff to look at how technology could enhance the newly designed curriculum. In addition to this, staff had to identify to School management teams how they were intending to meet the BL Strategy targets. The recognition of the importance of adopting blended approaches, in turn impacting on the quality and efficiency of learning and teaching has been felt. This has informed strategies and policies within specific Schools, contributed to a culture shift, and raised expectations of staff and students across the University.

With this in mind, the BL Week strategy approach was the most suitable given the scale and potential volume of support and guidance that would be needed. Building from this, the BL Week approach remains one of the services the Blended Learning Unit offers but it is unlikely that there will be another time where this approach will be as relevant as it was during the time of the Learning Works project.

Moving forward, the BLU needed to rethink this school based immersion approach and understand how it could be adapted for the changing context and priorities of the institution post Learning Works. The flexible, open nature of the BL Week sessions, (supporting staff with any relevant Bl query), informed the new model of face to face staff development programmes. These were launched by the BLU in 2011 and proved to be a popular approach as staff were familiar with the drop in, open format, due to their attendance of the School specific BL Weeks sessions (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: The current BLU staff development programme](image)
Currently in the institution, there is a move towards expanding our distance and online learning provision. Andersen (2011) states “We need theories of online learning that help us to invest our time and limited resources most effectively. There are many opportunities, but always critical shortages of resources – time being perhaps the scarcest of these – demanding that we maximise the efficiency of our development and educational delivery efforts.” (Andersen 2011, pg.46) Our future developments have been to adapt the one week immersion model into a four week online model for supporting staff in the expansion of their skills in distance and online learning. Two courses will shortly be launched:

- How to be an Online Tutor
- How to Design Online Learning

Both of these courses will be available to staff across the institution but as there are four schools currently involved in designing new priority flagship distance courses ready for 2012, staff from those schools will be invited to be amongst the first cohorts for these new courses. This approach differs from the BL weeks where the support was platform and context specific as appropriate to the member of staff; the online courses will, by necessity, be dealing with a technology context of distance and online learning.

Conclusion

The core objectives of the unit and the best means of delivering these aims are under constant review. The reflective and reflexive nature of the unit enables us to adapt and best serve the University in the face of any institutional or larger, political change affecting higher education in the UK. Numerous factors including meeting student expectations, delivering University strategies, global economic effects on education and the continued, rapid pace of development in online learning all impact and influence the manner in which the BLU meet the needs of the staff in a 21st Century university.

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E-Learning Summer School: a case study

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Abstract

In 2003, the then Learning Technology Team at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) ran, for the first time, a week long boot camp type event for its academic staff to facilitate their engagement with technology enhanced learning. That year over fifty academics attended the week which encompassed an innovative combination of workshops and reflective sessions exploring both existing and new technologies and their practical applications with students. The week was such a success that the E-Learning Summer School became a fixed event in the Institute’s academic calendar. As an event it has gone from strength to strength, attracting a lot of outside interest. In recent years it has grown to become the Dublin E-Learning Summer School run by DIT under the auspices of the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA). It is a model of good practice and this case study tells its story.

Introduction

The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is one of the largest Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ireland, with over 2,000 members of staff, 1,545 of whom are academic staff, and approximately 20,000 registered students, 20% of whom come from outside the country. The institution is spread across six campus sites in the city centre at present (Figure 1) but is due to relocate to one new education and research campus by 2016. Recognised as having led the way in technological higher education in Ireland, DIT currently offers a wide range of apprenticeship, ordinary degree, honours degree, masters and doctoral programmes.

Figure 1: DIT’s six campus sites

In response to the broad variety of technological, social, and economic challenges facing all HEIs as they moved into the new millennium, DIT adopted a 15 year Strategic Plan in 2001, supported by a series of three year operational plans. The plan recognised that in order to survive and prosper DIT must meet these aforementioned challenges head on and embrace the opportunities offered by them (DIT 2001, p.4). Within this plan e-learning featured many times as a possible method through which the various strategic objectives could be achieved and supported, prompting the Technical Working Group overseeing its implementation to recommend the establishment of a Learning Technology Team (LTT) to work alongside the existing Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) to support and develop e-learning at DIT. Subsequently, a five person team was established in 2002 with the expectation that, by 2005, 50% of the programmes at the institute would have a virtual presence using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) WebCT™ to enhance learning and teaching. It was also expected that the team would assist DIT staff in realising the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for producing pedagogically sound e-learning materials; and that they would keep abreast of all local, national and international developments in the area.

In January 2009, the LTT and the LTC merged to form the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC) whose aim is to develop, support and facilitate good teaching and learning practices across the institute.
In an effort to counteract the popular notion amongst academics new to e-learning that it is a technological solution rather than a pedagogical innovation (Salmon 2005, p.205), we focused our training efforts in our first academic year at DIT (2002/2003) very specifically on the pedagogical aspects of e-learning. A suite of interactive workshops entitled Planning your WebCT™ course, Designing Online Learning Materials, Online Assessment, Using Communication Tools, and Does E-Learning Work for You?, were designed, developed and run, each of which aimed to show how the technology could be used most effectively as a teaching tool. The feedback from these workshops was very positive showing that the participants were really beginning to engage with the necessary issues.

In that first year, we made contact with 289 academic staff through both workshops and one to one consultations and 150 WebCT™ modules in total were developed. This represented a growth rate of over 100% within six months with numbers increasing on a weekly basis. However, it took 32 individual workshops and a host of consultations in order to make contact with, and train, those 289 academic staff, showing an average of only nine attendees per workshop out of a workforce of over 1545 academics, which is really quite low. Despite the apparent enthusiasm about the e-learning project, staff members also often cancelled their places at these workshops at short notice for a wide variety of reasons, or contacted us to inquire as to whether previously run workshops would be rerun on a different day/week/month.

“Wednesday afternoons are the only time I’m free to attend workshops I’m afraid.”
“I just don’t have the time this semester for anything else! I’ll see next semester.”
“That workshop sounds great. I can’t go this week but maybe the next time you run it.”

Interestingly, such comments are not unique to DIT. The UCISA2008 TEL Survey of universities in the UK found that the lack of time was “overwhelmingly identified as the most significant barrier inhibiting academic engagement” with ICTs. It is also significant to note that some DIT staff attended the more basic planning or introductory workshops more than once if a period of time had lapsed since their initial training after which they had not managed to immerse themselves in the whole notion of using ICTs with their students and get a WebCT™ module up and running. We needed a different approach to give these interested but struggling academics a chance to devote the required time and effort to begin the journey of enhancing their teaching through technology. So, in early 2003 the idea of running a week long boot camp type event was proposed to run at the end of June.

The first DIT E-Learning Summer School

When it was first suggested by Kevin O’Rourke, Head of E-Learning Support and Development at DIT, to run a week long E-Learning Summer School at the end of June 2003, he was told it would never work. It was certainly an approach that had never been taken at the Institute before and questions as to whether any academics would attend at all were raised. Nevertheless, plans were put in place and that first E-Learning Summer School was a resounding success. While the week was conceived initially as a way of providing staff members with an opportunity to attend WebCT™ workshops that they had missed during the previous academic year, it quickly morphed into more of an event where participants could register for the entire week. Through a combination of workshops, guest speakers, and hands on WebCT™ training, participants could totally immerse themselves in existing and emerging learning technologies. They also got an opportunity to discuss how best they could utilise those technologies with their students to enhance and enrich the learning and teaching experience.

It was a very appropriate time at which to offer such a unique experience. There was a growing fear amongst academics in the higher education sector regarding the possibility of their jobs being displaced by the introduction of ICTs. This was coupled with some concern towards the demands implementing them was putting on their time and limited resources, and the fact that this was remaining largely unrecognised. The Summer School gave them a chance
to meet with like minded peers, dispel their fears, and become reliably informed as to what the technologies could do for them. Interestingly, eight years on the literature shows that some academics still perceive ICTs “as a threat rather than an opportunity” that puts them “out of their comfort zone” (O’Rourke 2010, p.xxii), and so there is still a huge demand for events such as an E-Learning Summer School, particularly in light of the increasingly pervasive adoption of technology in life and learning (HEFCE 2007, p.5). Our incoming students do not see e-learning as a separate or special activity but rather expect it to be an integral part of their learning process (HEFCE 2007, p.4/5; Concannon et al 2005, p.511), and academics must be ready to rise to this challenge.

Figure 3: snapshots of the E-Learning Summer School 2003

The proposed mixed E-Learning Summer School programme proved very popular and quite suddenly there was a high demand for places. So much so that it necessitated a venue change. We chose to move to an open, flexible space that served as the main event area and which was adaptable to different purposes during the week. We found that such a space encouraged a collegiate and collaborative atmosphere.

Purely from an administrative perspective, we limited the size of the cohort to approximately 55 in number and feedback from the participants both on that, and subsequent years, has meant that we have stuck with that number since. We questioned it again this year but still 72% of the participants disagreed that the Summer School might be better if more people attended, with one noting “I think the numbers were about right — enough to be able to get a wide variety of subject areas, disciplines and approaches but not too wide that it became anonymous”. Another participant even thought that if anything there were too many participants and suggested the number should be smaller, by saying “Too many people, not enough interaction”.

Figure 4: Summer School workshops

There was strong outside interest in participating in the Summer School that first year, but our focus was on devoting time to DIT staff specifically, and so places were not held for anyone outside of the Institute. However, people from outside DIT did participate in subsequent years and the benefits of that will be referred to at a later point in this case study.

The overall theme of the week that year was What is e-learning? with Monday to Thursday being themed around the particular topics planning, learning, designing and implementing, while Friday was devoted to using WebCT™ as a tutor specifically. The morning workshops took a blended approach to theory and practice and these were led by the LTT in collaboration with DIT staff with expertise in the area. The afternoon sessions were facilitated by external experts.
in a fashion that encouraged reflection and dialogue on pertinent issues such as intellectual property and copyright, disability, technology and culture, and alternate approaches to learning. Irish based speakers were invited only to make all references to policy and practice completely relevant to the participants and the Irish context. Lunch was provided each day, and an informal wine reception drew the afternoon sessions to a close with each facilitating lively discussions and debates on the days' topics. As the week went on, the importance of including such social aspects in the proceedings became increasingly obvious as the participants valued yet another chance to exchange views, offer opinions and forge links in a slightly more informal setting.

The materials used throughout the week, including presentations, were made available to the participants through a WebCT™ module to which they were each given access for a period of approximately two months. The module had been designed so as to demonstrate best practice and during the week became an important tool in a way in which had not been expected initially. For example, the discussion board in that module became a back channel for the week, much like Twitter® does now at such events, and links were shared and information disseminated in that way over and above the topics to which we had limited ourselves on the week's programme.

The feedback was very constructive and the participants found the week of huge value. So, as an e-learning event, it had certainly served its purpose, and was worth the months of time and effort on behalf of the team to plan, organise and run it. Without any hesitation it was decided to make the E-Learning Summer School an annual event at DIT.

Figure 5: Feedback from the E-Learning Summer School 2003

Flexibility is key

Each year saw the Summer School building on past experiences and feedback. In 2004, the breadth of the reflective sessions was widened featuring talks from the industry sector (Skool.ie™ and Intel®), the commercial third level sector (Hibernia College), the community (Digital Community Project) and the third level library sector (eprint Experience at NUIM). Furthermore, it was the first time non-DIT staff attended and that was a big contributory factor to the success of that year's school. Individuals from organisations such as the Defence Forces, FÁS, Teagasc, and the Government’s Department of Finance, as well as academics from other Irish third level institutions brought a unique perspective to the event that year. It also led to varied, yet overwhelmingly positive, feedback even if one particular session was deemed both the best and the worst of the week!

Based on both the formal feedback and informal chats with the participants from the 2003 and 2004 Schools, the programme for the E-Learning Summer School in 2005 saw the introduction of optional lunchtime sessions that participants could sign up for and that addressed very specific needs, such as Build your own webpage, Add sound to PowerPoint™ and Build an online assessment. The usual day long WebCT™ training on the Friday was also split into introductory and advanced streams to accommodate some of the DIT staff attending who, two years into DIT's e-learning initiative, had become more proficient at WebCT™ and wished to delve into the more advanced tools and settings. This was also the first year that a Summer School Dinner was organised for the Thursday evening. The idea of
including a dinner as part of the week added a new dimension to the event over which genuine links were forged and friendships made and so the dinner has remained as a permanent fixture on the week’s programme since.

Figure 6: Feedback from the E-Learning Summer School 2004

The key to such a successful annual event is being flexible enough to adapt it year on year to focus on pertinent issues, thereby keeping it exciting and relevant. In September 2008, DIT upgraded its VLE to Blackboard CE6™ and, in order to prepare for this significant change, the E-Learning Summer School in 2008 limited its numbers to 25 DIT staff concentrating heavily on the new platform with the participants attending intensive workshops over the week, receiving full training on the new system. Some time for reflection was included, however, with a panel discussion on the Thursday afternoon in which some DIT students participated giving a commentary on e-learning practice at DIT from their perspective.

Another great addition to the programme was the dinner as part of the week. The dinner added a new dimension to the event over which genuine links were forged and friendships made and so the dinner has remained as a permanent fixture on the week’s programme since.

Figure 7: E-Learning Summer School 2009

In 2009, the Summer School returned to its original format providing a hands on experience but with the added expectation that by the end of the week the participants would have the basic elements of an online module in place. Again, non-DIT academics joined the group as well as members of the Irish Police training college and trainers from the Irish Payroll Association.

However, it was 2010 that saw DIT’s E-Learning Summer School exceed all expectations to become the first ever Dublin E-Learning Summer School under the auspices of the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA).

The DRHEA is a strategic alliance of eight HE institutions in the wider Dublin area, created to strengthen Dublin’s HE sector “as an important contribution to the growth of Dublin’s competitive advantage in a European and broader international context”. As well as setting out to help academics become aware of trends and innovations in e-learning and how to incorporate them into their teaching, the alliance also aspires to foster collaboration across Dublin’s higher education colleges and to stimulate thought towards a vision for e-learning in the Dublin region. This pointed to extending the DIT E-Learning Summer School to become a wider Dublin event. The week was opened by the Lord Mayor of Dublin and closed with a keynote by Professor Tom Collins (NUI, Maynooth) on The Graduate of 2015.
Twitter® was introduced as a back channel for the first time and a diverse group of external followers got involved adding yet another dimension to the discussions. The main sessions were streamed and subsequently archived online. The week was a huge success and demonstrated that the idea of a summer school had a much wider appeal across a range of institutions. A review of the feedback survey shows that the week exceeded expectations for 65% of the participants, while 100% of them found the week a worthwhile experience, a good use of their time, and that they would recommend it to a colleague.

In response to suggestions made by the participants of 2010, it was possible for the 2011 participants to earn five credits through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for attending the week if they fulfilled additional assessment criteria. There was a lot of interest in this element of the week and it would appear to have been a welcome addition but at the time of writing (August 2011) its inclusion has yet to be evaluated. Furthermore, this summer’s cohort requested a follow up two day event mid academic year so that they could renew their enthusiasm, strengthen links forged, and report on progress made since the Summer School. So, plans for a two two day Winter School, to be hosted by one of the other DRHEA member institutions, is currently in the initial planning stage.

Figure 8: Members of the DRHEA

Figure 9: Lord Mayor of Dublin, Gerry Breen, and member of the DRHEA open the Dublin E-Learning Summer School 2011
Evaluation and conclusion

On the first day of the 2011 Summer School we received a tweet (see Figure 10) from a past participant encouraging that week’s cohort to get as much as they could from the event because it had completely shifted her perspective on teaching. It served as a welcome confirmation that the Summer School is worthwhile and genuinely helps improve academic engagement with learning technologies and has a discernible impact in the classrooms.

Figure 10: A tweet from a past participant of the E-Learning Summer School (elss)

Participants have also often emailed us after the event to express their thanks and to let us know what they got from the week. One that we received this year reads:

Figure 11: A thank you email from a 2011 participant

A more systematic review carried out recently with a number of past participants of the Summer School, to ascertain in more detail the direct impact that it has in enhancing the learning experience of the student, revealed that without having the chance to immerse themselves in the technologies and consider their place in the learning and teaching environment, many lecturers would either never use them at all or only use them in a very superficial way. Comments from four of those surveyed are given below (see Figure 12).
Figure 12: the impact of the Summer School on learning and teaching

We also get plenty of critical and constructive feedback each year too, for example, “the round table was, with respect, a complete waste of time”, “this is an E-Learning Summer School, flip charts should be incinerated on sight”, and “workshop facilitators should be given tight guidelines about workshop outcomes”. Such comments are also taken on board and help shape the Summer School the following year.

So, from very humble beginnings, the E-Learning Summer School has grown into an extremely successful venture that is highly effective at engaging both technologically adept and technologically reluctant academic staff in the use of technology, empowering them to excel. We believe that the Summer School is not only currently unique but a model that could be replicated easily, and not just in Ireland but internationally. To that end, we are actively holding it up as a model of best practice and have begun presenting it at conferences and in publications and would be delighted to speak with any institution wishing to design and develop their own.

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6 From traditional face to face sessions, workshops and conferences to online hands on experiential staff development: Online Educational Alternatives Course

Asanka Dayananda and Agi Ryder, Middlesex University

Abstract

This case study describes an online approach to traditional staff development that is being implemented at the Centre for Teaching and Learning Enhancement at Middlesex University, London since March 2011. The online educational alternatives course seeks to encourage programme and module teams to collectively adopt technology enhanced approaches. It aims to provide experiential knowledge and skills through the online course by immersing the participants in the very technology they are being encouraged to adopt.

Institutional goals

Research indicates that “if the goal of the higher education institution is the integration of technology for a transformative change, then rather than the acquisition of technology itself, there must be a clear focus on the faculty members who use technology” (Zayim, Yildirim and Saka 2006, p.220). Lynch, Altschuler and McClure (2002) also agree “It’s not about budgets. It’s not even about network overload. When it comes to applying digital technology in the classroom, the biggest obstacle for higher education has nothing to do with resources or wiring. It’s about faculty members.” (para.1).

Recent institutional policies in higher education (HE) are creating a need to bridge the academics’ experience gap between technology enhanced and traditional approaches. Middlesex University itself embarked on an e-assessment project in 2010 that aims to provide students with more opportunities for online assessment, coursework submission and e-feedback. These new e-assessment strategies demand that academics acquire skills and knowledge to implement a variety of e-assessment methods. This, in turn, is increasing the demand for staff development. It is becoming more and more difficult to meet this demand through face to face sessions, whilst at the same time maintaining the quality of staff development and support mechanisms.

Traditional staff development

Traditionally, staff development at Middlesex University, as in many other HE institutions, is offered in the form of conferences, workshops and one to one or small group sessions provided either by the Schools or the Centre for Teaching and Learning Enhancement (CLTE).

Conferences are often seen as excellent opportunities to network with other professionals with similar interests and tap into new trends, ideas and solutions from outside the organisation. Although the demonstration of good practice and the dissemination of findings from successful projects usually invoke interest in new teaching methods, financial and time constraints usually limit attendance at such events to a handful of academics from the University.

The workshops we offer in CLTE on technology enhanced learning and teaching, mostly attract recruit technology enthusiasts. Learning outcomes of the workshops vary depending on the nature of a session. Some workshops are purely geared towards considering pedagogical underpinnings of approaches while others aim to provide experiential knowledge and skills and include hands on activities using different types of learning technology. Participant feedback frequently indicates the need for workshops that combine pedagogical discussions with practical, hands on experience. Another factor that comes to play when running face to face workshops is time. Workshops are usually delivered in two hours during the day when most academic staff are busy teaching. In addition, due to time limitations, it is presumed that all participants have the same learning needs and are capable of keeping up with the pace of the session. Participant feedback from our past workshops indicate that some attendees commonly concede to a culture of attending a single two hour workshop session and when they return to their offices they neglect to put the acquired skills and knowledge into practice due to lack of time and soon the new skills are forgotten.

The other main avenue used by the University for developing skills and the knowledge necessary for engaging with technology enhanced approaches for staff is through one to one and small group sessions. These sessions tend to
be more successful as the people instigating them are highly motivated and have specific learning goals in mind. However, this approach is very resource intensive and the number of individuals and small groups that can be engaged through this approach is limited by the number of facilitators available.

Traditional staff development at the University faces many other challenges, for example, the geographical spread of academics both nationally and internationally (campuses in London, Dubai, Mauritius), time zone differences, and overlaps with teaching schedules. Another issue that we increasingly have to deal with is scheduling staff development sessions that cater for part time and hourly paid staff.

The challenges faced by these traditional modes of staff development led to gradual realisation that an online staff development course covering technology enhanced approaches may be a good way forward. It would allow us to tackle some of the challenges mentioned above as well as create a novel opportunity to immerse educators in the very technologies that they are being asked to adopt.

Looking at published research findings it became evident that educators lacked opportunities to develop first-hand experience, knowledge and skills to use technology enhanced approaches. Authors such as Delfino and Persico (2007) Watson (2007) identify the educator experience as one of the main factors influencing adoption of online teaching practices. Gu et al (2009) and Duncan and Barnett (2009) state that there is a shortage of opportunities to gain this much needed experience. There is also concern expressed that “teachers are asked to teach in an online environment with little or no prior experience, and with limited training” (Rice and Dawley, 2007, p.8). In addition to experience of teaching online, Duncan (2005) and Jung (2005) state the need for educators to experience the learner perspective. Our course was designed to immerse teachers in online learning both as teachers and participants and thus offer them an appreciation of both teaching and learning online.

Recognising the need for staff development to deliver both experiential knowledge and relevant pedagogical theories led to the search for online teaching approaches that could deliver this through online activities. Experiential learning theories such as that of Kolb (1984) have been used to design course activities in the face to face setting and these have been applied to the design of the online learning course too.

**Tackling issues related to adoption of technology enhanced approaches**

We looked to the principles expounded by transformative learning theories to convince reluctant academics of the benefits offered by technology enhanced approaches. Work of authors such as Mezirow (1997) suggest that misconceptions, feelings and beliefs regarding technology may be challenged through first hand experiential knowledge and skills and this in turn may reshape views and impact practice. Haldane (2003) reports reluctance shown by academics to engage with whiteboards in classrooms and states that realising pedagogic benefits actually follow development of skills and increase in confidence.

It was decided that we would initially target programme teams in the hope that the collaborative learning experience will also indirectly engage non-enthusiasts. Another advantage of collaborative learning is the opportunity presented to develop deeper understanding through supporting and helping others with both course design and potential technical problems. The programme teams were made up of academic staff teaching a common subject (programme leaders, module leaders, module tutors) and subject administrators, the people who design, teach and deliver together the online elements of a course.

It was also decided that providing staff development through an online course that uses the very technologies that academics are being encouraged to adopt would be the ideal way to achieve total immersion in the alternative approaches. Additionally, online learning could address many of the issues faced by traditional approaches such as the geographical location of staff, part time workers, conflicts with teaching schedules and providing staff with both teaching and learning perspectives.
### Course options considered

When designing the online course we considered the following options:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self study course without collaboration | interactive activities  
encourages independent study  
self-paced  
unlimited participants  
moderation not required | lack of social interaction  
lacks guidance from facilitator |
| *Collaborative course with e-moderation | power of learning community  
social interaction  
guidance from facilitator | need for facilitation limits cohort size |
| Course open to individuals from all disciplines | diversity of participants | programme teams not targeted,  
non-enthusiasts may opt out |
| * Course open to programme teams only | collaborative learning leads to  
collective experience, reflection  
evaluation of the alternative approaches  
targets both enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts | difficult to schedule course runs to cater teams |
| * Release all sections to everyone | academics exposed to all approaches | time constraints |
| Control release of course sections | course customised to meet learning need | limits exposure to different approaches |
| Course availability not limited | can refer to content at anytime | collaboration unlikely  
e-moderation difficult |
| * Course availability – limited to three weeks | collaboration possible  
facilitation possible | schedule may not be suitable to all participants |

*Options selected for the online educational alternatives course*

**Figure 1:** Strengths and weaknesses of course options that were considered

### The educational alternatives online course

The course tackles common educational approaches such as reusable learning objects (RLOs), e-assessment and feedback mechanisms, e-discussions, e-journal, e-workbooks and audio feedback.

The course starts off with an online induction section; covering course navigation, course schedule, and using online discussions. Discussions form the main mode of online communication and collaboration. Figure 2 below shows the first activities and an interactive video tutorial that takes participants step by step through the process of using online discussion boards.

*Figure 2: online activities and video demonstrations built into the course*
The course takes each alternative approach in turn to:

- compare it to traditional practice
- look at both teaching and learning perspectives
- consider research evidence and experiences of other academics who have used the approach in their practice
- demonstrate the possible use of the approach

It provides opportunities to:

- gain hands on experience through built in activities
- reflect in and on action
- evaluate experience
- consider appropriateness for own practice and plan implementation

Programme teams were given access to the course over a three week period to work collaboratively through the sections. The course was e-moderated by two facilitators.

Figure 3: Hands on experience of using an e-workbook from the learner perspective

Course design

The course also draws on e-learning development needs of academic staff at the School of Health and Social Sciences, identified through online self administered questionnaires. Over a hundred lecturers responded to the questionnaire indicating their current use of and interest in using online learning tools and approaches. Data was gathered on the use of tools such as discussion boards, quizzes, and online assessment submission methods, such as Turnitin. Individual academics also expressed interest in wanting more staff development on a variety of other online learning approaches, such as reflective learning, audio feedback, podcasting, electronic workbooks and portfolios, virtual worlds, reusable learning objects and collaborative and peer learning.

Resources from face to face workshops and one to one training sessions were adapted to suit an online collaborative learning environment. The course contains interactive video guides that take the participants through online course activities step by step (figure 3). A pilot run of the course was used to identify and rectify common access and participation problems faced by participants. The course requires e-facilitation and this determines the number of times the course runs in a given year.
Questionnaires and discussions built into the course collects participants’ evaluations of their experience. Feedback received on learning activities and design enables the course to be continually modified as problems are identified.

Evaluation and impact

How many academics were engaged?
This course is still in its initial stages of implementation. So far, six programme teams consisting mainly of teaching teams, module and programme leaders and directors of programmes have been engaged. The number of staff members that make up a programme team can vary from programme to programme but can typically have from 6 to 20 members. There are plans to engage other programme teams over the coming year.

How was impact measured?
At this stage of implementation, the impact on teaching and learning practice is still being explored. Feedback from participants indicates that the course is increasing awareness of benefits afforded by technology enhanced approaches. An experience of both teaching and learning perspectives were appreciated, and was noted by a lecturer who claims it is “very helpful to see full potential. I can see how frustrating it can be when no one uses the discussion board!” (Participant A)

There are signs that indicate that experience gained may also be increasing confidence, one participant states “I feel more confident to use it in my module, now that I have had some hands on experience.” (Participant B)

The online course has provided opportunities to increase awareness of technology enhanced approaches, obtain hands on experience and to get a taste of independent, flexible online learning. For many it was the first time they engaged in any kind of online learning even though they are increasingly required to deliver blended/online sessions. Although one participant was happy with the approach, she acknowledged the discipline and time required for online learning by stating that the approach was “excellent. Just wish I had more time to complete at a more leisurely pace.” (Participant C)

As students are increasingly expected to be able to learn online, it is important that academics recognise the study skills required by online learning and thus become better equipped to provide appropriate support and guidance to their students.

Academics appreciated the flexibility of online learning; one participant explained how she fitted her online learning “in between chores and other interruptions... from home” (Participant E). Another lecturer commented on “reading articles about Turnitin, going through the process of document submission and using the comments repository were all good” (Participant F). Although educators generally tend to keep up with research outputs in their own teaching fields, the online course has given them an opportunity to consider research findings related technology enhanced practices within these subject areas. Discussions with other teaching colleagues and facilitators gave them opportunities for both collective and individual reflection on their practice and on their learning. The value placed on this opportunity and the time to engage with their colleagues is expressed by one participant who claims that the aspect of the course they most enjoyed is receiving “feedback from other colleagues” on their ideas/future projects (Participant D) as they took part in the online course activities.

The extent of transformative change brought about by acquired experiential knowledge and skills and how this reshaped participants’ beliefs, perceptions and impacted on their teaching practice is still to be explored further. However, it is hoped that this experience has informed both the practical and pedagogical approaches they employ when they design their own online modules. It may also influence how they introduce and engage their students in alternative approaches.

How sustainable and scalable is this activity?
The flexibility and reusability of online courses enables educational developers to run several cohorts simultaneously, the main factor limiting the number of runs is the availability of facilitators. There are plans to open up the course across the University. The course is organised in chunks, so the needs of specific teams can be met through the customised release of learning units and topics. Chunks can also form parts of other online courses, and serve as stepping stones for staff development, for example, the content relating to RLOs can form the basis of a more in depth course on RLOs as and when required.

What was – or will be – the wider organisational impact?
The course will be offered across the University to other programme teams. Experiential knowledge and skills of this nature will increase staff awareness when embarking on new teaching approaches, give opportunity to engage with alternative teaching practices, gain hands on experience prior to implementation and nurture collaborative learning.
Problems encountered and lessons learnt

Although online learning allows much more flexibility in terms of time and space compared to traditional methods, it is still necessary for course runs to avoid overlap with busy teaching periods. In some cases it may be necessary to have more than one run of the course for a programme team.

A few participants expressed anxiety due to inexperience with online learning and confusion with the terminology used. In these instances it was necessary to organise additional telephone and or face to face support to get them up to speed with online learning.

There were requests from some academics for the online course material to be easily printable. It was recognised by the course developers that this may increase flexibility, and provide opportunities to read course material on the go, and may actually increase participation. This method of bridging the gap between previous learning techniques and online learning is being considered for future runs.

It was apparent that customising and targeting the course sections to programme team needs may be a more effective way to deal with time constraints faced by participants. There are plans to identify needs through an introductory video and poll of participants.

Future developments

This work will be disseminated via publications and conferences in the future. The course is undergoing constant evaluation and redevelopment. In the coming year, it is hoped that this course will be implemented and evaluated with programme teams that operate across international campuses.

A PhD study will be carried out by one of the authors to explore participants’ views and beliefs of how the course and its activities are delivering experiential knowledge and skills. The study will look at transformations in participants’ views and beliefs as a result of experience and knowledge acquired through the course and will consider the implications this has on reshaping teaching and learning practice. The research will also seek to identify factors that determine the delivery of online experiential knowledge and skills with the intention of improving online activities and thus delivery.

Transferability

Factors such as knowledge, experience, skills and resources available to institutions would determine the ease of implementation of this approach. In the opinion of the authors reusability of the course and flexibility of anytime, anywhere online learning is well worth the investment in time and resources in this mode of staff development.

References


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The first rule of e-learning is – no one talks about e-learning: rethinking approaches to staff development in learning and teaching with technology

Lindsay Jordan, University of the Arts London

Abstract
This case study describes how blogs have been introduced as a tool for collaborative learning and reflection on the PG Certificate in Academic Practice at UAL. Blogs are one of several technologies that have been embedded into the course activities with the objective of giving teaching staff a positive personal experience of learning with technology. This particular project has both exposed the true extent of challenges that teaching staff experience in incorporating appropriate technologies into their practice, and allowed us to learn valuable lessons that we are keen to share with other institutions.

Description and context
Like many universities, UAL offers professional development programmes for its teaching staff. Our Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching (PG Cert) is somewhat unusual in that it is compulsory not merely for those new to teaching, or new to the University, but for all staff with significant teaching responsibilities, regardless of prior experience. Around 100 teachers, including full time and associate lecturers, visiting lecturers and technicians, complete the one year course annually. Typically, around 90% are UAL staff, with 10% employed by other HE institutions.

The problem we have been trying to address is raising the digital literacy of art and design teachers. Many teachers (and students) in artistic disciplines have a predilection for physical, hands on craft, and this is often coupled with a degree of emotional resistance to many things digital. Average class sizes in art and design are considerably smaller than in other subject disciplines and objective testing is virtually non-existent; therefore, teachers may feel that communication and organisational affordances of learning technologies are less relevant to their context. We want to ensure that teachers are not only aware of learning technologies that will be of use to them and their students, but also that they leave the programme with experience of using them as a learner and, in some cases, experience of using them with their own students.

During the recent validation of the our new Continuing Professional Development Framework, which includes the PG Cert, the addition of an optional unit in e-learning or educational technologies was suggested, discussed and rejected in favour of continuing to develop an embedded approach to raising digital literacy. Our preference within the programme team is to provide teaching staff with positive personal experiences of using technologies for learning and teaching, rather than explicit instruction. The JISC have proposed exactly this approach with specific reference to improving digital literacy “Skills acquired iteratively, through practice, and as needed, are better retained than those taught one off, in isolation, and through instruction.” (JISC, 2009). Over the last 18 months, participants on the PG Cert have been required to engage with instructional video, interactive reading lists, online induction seminars, online assignment submission and feedback, discussion boards, wikis and individual and group blogs. Crucially, these technologies have been introduced as conduits for learning outcomes unrelated to e-learning or educational technologies; for example, all participants are required to use a wiki to sign up to present their teaching development project proposals. Interactive online seminars and instructional video are the two options through which participants can familiarise themselves with the learning activities and assignments they are required to complete, and the various learning environments and resources available to them. Technologies tied to compulsory activities, such as the wikis and online assignment submission and feedback, see 100% engagement, while those related to elective activities gain less exposure (commonly around 50%). Feedback from current participants and graduates supports the notion that participants not only value these technologies as part of their learning experience on the PG Cert, but also that they are interested in using them with their own students.

This case study focuses on one specific intervention; the use of blogs as learning journals and discussion environments. The use of blogs for recording creative and learning processes has particular relevance to art and design education, and several teachers at UAL have been innovating in this area for a number of years.
Tutor group blogs were formally introduced to the PG Cert curriculum in March 2010. Participants were asked to post their project proposals and updates on their tutor group blog space and respond to each other with feedback. Participation varied between tutor groups as tutors moderated the blogs with varying degrees of enthusiasm and comfort with the interface. Nevertheless, a handful of participants used the blog at key points in the course to post up and discuss their ideas, plans and outcomes, and it appears that these individuals benefited from doing so. All these regular bloggers achieved a final grade of 70% or above, and a significant proportion contacted the programme team on completion with positive personal feedback about the course and how they felt they benefited from using the blogs.

Looking to maximise these benefits (and to take advantage of UAL’s new Buddypress installation), in March 2011, we introduced a series of online activities for participants to complete through their own individual blogs. Hoping that it would increase motivation to participate, we organised the participants into random pairs and incorporated the exchange of peer feedback into the tasks. Although we had higher expectations of participation with this more formal approach, which was discussed and agreed with participants beforehand, no significant increase in participation has been evident. The new activities were designed to be student led, with minimal tutor input required once peer partnerships had become established. However, as the weeks wore on and 50% of participants failed to sign up for a blog, attempt the activities or respond to emails, an unprecedented amount of tutor time was spent chasing no shows, dealing with frustrated participants who had expected their effort to be rewarded with a meaningful conversation and, in many cases, supplying that conversation ourselves.

Our observations of, and the feedback points received from this most recent cohort have enabled us to make informed decisions in the redesign of the online activities for the new, larger cohort of around 100 participants due to commence their PG Cert studies in September 2011. In identifying and addressing key issues with the way the activity is designed, introduced and assessed, we hope to have prevented a recurrence of the situation described above. This is discussed further below.

Evaluation and impact

Our overall objective in addressing teachers’ digital literacy in these ways is to provide teachers with positive experiences of learning with digital tools and technologies so that they might consider these tools when addressing challenges in their own teaching practice.

Happily, there is some evidence of this; such as the following extract from the final reflective profile of a participant from the September 2010 cohort:

“I plan to make more use of blogs, having navigated such tools whilst being a student on the PG Cert. Pushing [my students] to start a blog from the first week with clear defined rules (such a minimum number of posts per week) will serve as a way to support [the explication of] tacit knowledge and dialogue. I also believe it will be of great resource to myself; monitoring progress as well as aiding me in choosing relevant material that will be of benefit to them.”

Although at this stage the use of blogs was voluntary, this participant clearly saw the potential of the tool both as an environment for reflection and dialogue, and to record the learning process for assessment and feedback purposes. Evidence from teaching development project reports and reflective profiles shows that around 25% of the 70 strong 2010 cohort began using a new digital tool or technology with their own students during the year long programme. For example, across my own tutor group of 20, who have now completed their studies, one is using Tumblr (mini blogging), two are using blogs, one is giving audio feedback through Wimba Voice and one is using Google Docs for the collaborative organisation of presentations. An additional bonus of these interventions, forming an integral part of the participants’ PG studies, is that they were evaluated thoroughly through self reflection, the collection of student feedback and an analysis of impact on their own students’ learning.

With these changes to teaching practice in evidence, one can see why we are keen to increase engagement with the online activities. However, pairing up the participants in the March 2011 cohort had no observable impact on motivating them to take part. In some cases, as these extracts from one to one conversations with participants show, it was demotivating to those who would probably have done the activities anyway, as expectations were raised and then dashed:

“I wrote my first post and emailed my partner, but got nothing back. It was a real let down.”

“My [learning journal] partner never appeared, which was really frustrating…it fizzled out.”

Out of 38 participants in the March 2011 cohort (19 pairs), despite all 38 having agreed to the scheme during an initial face to face workshop, where they were shown how to sign up for and post on a blog using the University’s Buddypress system, only 18 have set up a blog of their own to date.

Numbers were even lower in the first few weeks of the course until I produced short screencasts that took participants through the process of signing up for a blog, writing and editing posts and comments and other tasks. This yielded some positive feedback from participants and a small observable rise in activity.
As requested by the participants, the partnerships had been randomly created and, three months into the course, there were 12 solitary bloggers and just three pairs. Of these three pairs, only one exchanged feedback on their respective blogs, while a small number of participants continued to benefit from using their blog as a personal learning and research journal:

“In the end I just decided to write for myself, and I did feel I got something out of it.”

On one occasion where a participant (Q) had written a thoughtful response to a particular task that I felt deserved some peer feedback and discussion, I contacted that participant’s tutor group and requested they all post up a comment or question within the week. Nothing happened, prompting Q to respond:

“There must be some kind of educational terminology for this kind of cyber forced participation and the humiliation that follows for the blogger...”

Q provided valuable feedback on the online activities (including some suggestions for tasks that would encourage shared dialogue without focusing on literature) and a student perspective of participation in terms of strategic learning:

“We become aware of which are the assessable tasks and are tactical in our submissions. Do you have to make all tasks summatively assessable to get the best out of us (please no)! This is particularly difficult in a part time distance based course where that shared experience takes on a very different form.”

Without the capacity to hold learners captive in a physical space, it is exceptionally difficult to ensure participation in prescribed learning activities without the stick of summative assessment. Despite being in agreement with Q that, in an ideal world, participation in learning activities should not have to be forced, there is also the carrot perspective; if an activity is important and results in learning, it should be rewarded and taken into account when awarding a grade.

Many of our graduates tell us that the most important aspect of the PG Cert for them has been the message in the medium – i.e. the very experience of being in the role of the learner, and reflecting on the teacher’s role from a student perspective. A colleague recently told me that when he was studying on the PG Cert he was painfully conscious of turning into a nightmare student; the following email from a PG Cert participant is fairly typical:

“Just been looking for my letter with hand in details for 2nd September and I can’t find it... Do you know where I hand in ? Sorry feel like one of my students asking you this:)

These trivial observations that participants make of their own learning behaviours often lead to more fundamental realisations about the strategies learners employ and the choices they make, as demonstrated in the conversation with Q. Somewhat amusingly, it may be true that what some participants have learned from not completing the online activities may be more valuable than what they would have learned in doing them. Rather than taking this as an argument for giving up, we have consciously built reflection on participation, and self and peer assessment of contribution, into the redesign of the activities.

Problems encountered and lessons learnt

The table below summarises the important problems encountered so far and the actions taken with the September 2011 cohort as a result of the lessons learnt (which are explained further in the following section):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Actions taken</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants not signing up for a blog</td>
<td>The whole cohort will be taken through the sign-up process during their initial two day workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants not posting any responses to the tasks on their blog</td>
<td>We have asked all participants to complete a pre-course writing task which they are to bring to the first workshop and publish on their blog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants not communicating with their specified learning partner</td>
<td>We have organised participants into small groups instead of pairs to mitigate against drop out or deferral, and have maximised opportunities for students to work in these groups during the face to face workshop. The groups formulate learning contracts that set out how they will work together to achieve their desired outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants not engaging with the activities</td>
<td>We have introduced terminal self and peer assessment of contribution which is validated by tutors and contributes 10% of the unit grade.</td>
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</table>
Future developments

Previously, the intensive workshops took place at a conference centre with no PC suite. With the initial March 2010 cohort we attempted a sign up session through participants' laptops but wifi problems brought the session to a standstill. Now the workshops take place on site, we have the opportunity to lead new participants through setting up and writing their blogs during a face to face session in the PC suite.

The current September 2011 cohort were instructed to write a 100–300 word summary of how they view their teaching practice and what they hope to gain from undertaking the PG Cert, to be uploaded as their first post during the initial session in the PC suite. The objective is that all participants leave the initial workshop with their own blog and the ability to write and publish posts and comments.

We have changed the grouping of participants significantly for the September 2011 cohort in response not only to the problems outlined above but also to reduce dependence on programme tutors and allow assessment responsibilities to be shared more flexibly. The previous tutor group model has been dissolved in favour of small learning groups of 3–4 participants who do not share a personal tutor, and work independently together during the face to face workshops. Our primary objective in this is to encourage the development of learning relationships between participants and increase participants' motivation to engage in constructive dialogue.

The initial workshop also includes a session where participants formulate group learning contracts that set out what they want to achieve from engaging with the online activities and how they will work with the other members of their group to achieve this. Each participant will refer back to this in the completion of a terminal self and peer assessment exercise, which is validated by their tutor and contributes 10% of the unit grade. Although potentially a complex exercise that is likely to throw up a new set of problems, we want to ensure participants' ownership of the activity, and the assessment of it, is maximised; again to increase participants' intrinsic motivation to engage.

At the time of writing, all 96 members of the new cohort have set up their blogs and posted their initial writing task. Around 50% have posted up their response to the first reading task, although what is lacking at this stage is evidence of interaction on the blogs. Although participants are explicitly required to engage in discussion of one another's posts and are given specific questions to respond to, it appears that participants find the process of entering another participant's space to engage in conversation particularly difficult.

Responding to participants' requests, we have run two online help sessions for managing blog visibility and notifications, and produced additional screencasts that have been viewed by around 25% of the cohort. A need has been identified for further resources to assist participants with setting up RSS feeds from and to their peers' blogs, which will be produced in due course.

The session where the groups set their learning contracts proved less complex than initially feared; however, the proof of this particular pudding will emerge when participants are required to use their agreed criteria in the peer and self assessment exercise in March 2012. We have decided to initiate an interim peer assessment activity, both to test out the system and to provide formative peer feedback, at the unit halfway point in December 2011.

Further dissemination of this work is dependent on the outcomes achieved with the September 2011 cohort; not only whether they continue to engage with the learning activities as anticipated but, more importantly, what impact it has on their own practice.

Transferability

It is expected that the lessons we learned in implementing these activities, and the action points detailed above, will be of use to other professional development teams in evaluating and redesigning their own programmes. Variables such as cohort size, available teaching spaces and other factors influencing the mode of delivery of such programmes will of course affect the relevance of our experience.

References


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Aberystwyth University (AU) has seen a transformative impact on academic engagement brought about by synergy between E-Learning Support in Information Services and the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education (PGCTHE) programme. E-learning, also referred to as technology enhanced learning (TEL), is now a regular part of staff development training for new academic staff, with good practice shared across departments. This empowers academics to develop innovative and effective teaching interventions and encourages community building.

In E-Learning Support, we wanted to address several facets of a common problem. There was a perceived separation of e-learning from general learning and teaching. In consultations and training sessions for TEL, there was often a focus on the technical how to of a tool as divorced from pedagogy. We wanted to link the support and training we provide in e-learning more closely to the messages academics were receiving from other areas of the University about good practice in learning and teaching.

We looked at two sides of the issue. Firstly, we aligned our training with the core pedagogical principles as taught in the PGCTHE and then embedded TEL training in the PGCTHE programme. Secondly, we created further avenues for academic staff to share their good practice more widely with the University community, complementing the existing opportunities already afforded by the PGCTHE. This gives academic staff more opportunities to learn from the experience of their peers in using technology to support learning, and more channels to receive guidance from e-learning staff.

There are five basic stages in this cyclic process:

1. E-Learning Support staff work with PGCTHE staff to coordinate our message.
2. Both E-Learning Support and PGCTHE staff provide training sessions for academic staff, reinforcing sound pedagogical principles. E-Learning Support staff deliver a session on TEL at the induction for new PGCTHE candidates, which is followed by a series of short workshops on specific technologies and approaches to TEL, open to all staff.
3. As part of their work for the PGCTHE, academic staff design and implement several teaching interventions (teaching cycles) based on an action research model. Many of these interventions make use of technology.
4. Academic staff disseminate their experience by giving presentations at a mini conference organised by the PGCTHE. E-Learning Support staff provide two further dissemination opportunities; the Nexus website for sharing good practice in TEL and showcase events, such as a series of brown bag talks given by academics.
5. The dissemination activities, in turn, enhance the quality of learning and teaching. Academic staff benefit directly through reading the Nexus website and attending the mini conference and brown bag talks. They also benefit indirectly, as E-Learning Support staff use the knowledge gained from the dissemination events to enrich our TEL training. Knowing how staff are using TEL effectively and what pitfalls they have encountered helps us advise other academics. When appropriate, we can put staff into contact with others who share common interests.

See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of the cyclical process of synergy between PGCTHE and E-Learning Support staff as we support academics in using technology to enhance learning.
This synergy began in 2003, when channels of communication between E-Learning Support and the PGCTHE were opened, with an increase in dialogue over time through regular meetings and telephone contact. In 2006, we ran the first of the pedagogically focussed training sessions, which was co-designed with the PGCTHE Coordinator at the time, Luke Desforges. From 2007 to the present, we have worked closely with Jo Maddern, the current PGCTHE Coordinator.

Core members of E-Learning Support attended the PGCTHE residential induction in 2007 and 2011. From 2007 onwards, E-Learning Support staff have regularly given a presentation on TEL at the PGCTHE induction and our training sessions have been recommended for PGCTHE candidates.

Gwella, a Wales wide initiative sponsored by the Higher Education Funding Council, Wales (HEFCW) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has allowed the group to undertake several projects relevant to our coordination with the PGCTHE, by providing funding to expand the E-Learning Support group.

In the Summer of 2008, we completely revamped the TEL training programme as part of our Gwella activities.

In 2009, we created the Nexus website, populated in part through a stream of new case studies from PGCTHE candidates as they complete TEL related teaching cycles.

In 2010, E-Learning staff carried out a learner experience study focussing on TEL, designed in consultation with Jo Maddern. The results have been fed back to the University as a whole and are being used to support further enhancement of TEL training and general learning and teaching support.

Not all of our developments were part of Gwella. In December 2010, we held an event to showcase good practice in TEL, supported by our JISC Building Capacity project. The event featured talks by academics and complemented the PGCTHE mini conferences. It served as a pilot for a series of brown bag talks by academic staff in AY2011/12.

A Journal of Academic Practice was launched in 2010 and is hosted on Nexus. Edited by Jo Maddern, it features articles written by PGCTHE candidates, graduates, and other academic staff.

Senior management support has been crucial in our ability to implement change. E-Learning Support has been aligned with and supported by the University E-Learning Strategy since 2006, and subsequently by the Learning and Teaching Strategy. It is also aligned to HEFCW’s Strategy for Enhancing Learning and Teaching through Technology.

This multifaceted approach required staff time to establish, but once Nexus and the new courses were created, maintaining them has required less time. These activities are now seen as part of our core remit.

**Evaluation and impact**

Impact of the synergy between PGCTHE and E-Learning Support staff has been measured quantitatively and qualitatively. We have seen academic engagement with TEL increasing steadily.

In 2007–2008, AU participated in the HEA E-learning Benchmarking exercise. We used the e-Learning Maturity Model (eMM) to analyse practices across five departments. Part of our research involved focus groups with academic staff...
in various departments. A pattern emerged. The departments with the most mature e-learning processes also had a larger percentage of staff who were undertaking or had just completed the PGCTHE.

Linking TEL training to the PGCTHE has expanded our reach, because all new academics are required to participate in the PGCTHE. Other academic staff are also welcome to attend the mini conferences, TEL training courses, the brown bag series, and to view the Nexus website. From August 2010–2011, Nexus has had 5,799 visits from 109 countries, including 2,037 visits from within Aberystwyth.

We have seen an increase in the number of academics and other staff taking training in TEL. In 2010/11, there were 132 staff attendances at TEL training sessions and showcase events, plus an additional 55 staff who had one to one or small group consultations. This compares with a total of 97 attendances at TEL training sessions in 2005/6.

There has been a steady flow of TEL based teaching cycles in the PGCTHE. The need for participants to analyse and evaluate the impact of their interventions on student learning using models such as the Kolb reflective cycle or the Theories of Change (ToC) model has meant that a steady stream of empirical data about the use of TEL is generated, recorded and disseminated. The PGCTHE acts as a testing ground for the wider scale acceptance of emerging technologies that enhance learning as well as highlighting any problems with the technologies. These are then fed back to E-Learning Support staff through consultations and the mini conferences that happen three times a year.

In Summer 2011, under Jo Maddern’s supervision, Simon Cameron digitised a large number of PGCTHE teaching cycles from the archives and carried out a keyword analysis. Funding from the AU Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund supported the digitisation project. Simon noted three peaks in the number of teaching cycles featuring TEL (see Figure 2).

![Teaching Cycles featuring Technology-enhanced Learning](image)

**Figure 2: teaching cycles featuring TEL**

The high number of TEL related teaching cycles correlates with the emergence of new technologies as well as closer working between the PGCTHE team and E-Learning Support staff to create mini laboratories where academic staff use reflective and evidence informed practice to test new technologies in their own teaching contexts.

The peak in 2008 coincides with embedding of TEL training in the PGCTHE programme in 2007 and the Gwella activity and expansion of general training provision in 2008. Although the data only includes part of 2011, that peak is nearly as high as in 2008. More teaching cycles are expected to be completed in the remaining months of 2011.

Digitised versions of the archived teaching cycle portfolios have been submitted to the AU online research repository, Cadair and mirrored on the HEA EvidenceNet site. More than 300 teaching cycles were submitted, allowing greater dissemination of the empirical experiences of academic staff employing TEL in their everyday practices. This enables staff across the institution to transcend traditional departmental silos and create communities of practice around clusters of pedagogic interests.

Numbers do not tell the whole story, however. Having a large number of staff taking TEL training courses or using technology is good, providing that they use technology **effectively** for learning and teaching. The real measure is whether student learning is enhanced.
Several indicators suggest a positive relationship between effective practice and the PGCTHE/e-learning synergy.

- Winners of the Aberystwyth University Award for Teaching Excellence in recent years include a high proportion of staff who have experienced the PGCTHE programme and have consulted with or had training from E-Learning staff.
- PGCTHE candidates are frequently awarded funding for TEL based projects through the e-Learning Development Fund and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Fund.
- Students responding to the Gwella learner experience study frequently praised specific TEL projects and teaching interventions by staff who have undertaken the PGCTHE.

There has been significant impact on the institution, with a culture change as more and more academic staff reflect on pedagogic practice and share their TEL experiences. On going cross departmental dialogues among academic and support staff have become normal practice at Aberystwyth.

**Problems encountered and lessons learnt**

We have encountered very few problems. At busy times of the year, it is not always easy to timetable meetings between E-Learning Support and PGCTHE staff, but participating in the PGCTHE Board of Studies and also in task group to advise on the redesign of the PGCTHE programme has ensured that E-Learning staff maintain close contact with the programme.

One of the reasons for the success of this approach is that academics have many opportunities to learn from each other, facilitated by E-Learning and PGCTHE staff. The good practice events and publication on Nexus provide public recognition for excellent teaching practice for academics, empowering them to develop effective applications of technology to enhance student learning. Academics have a sense of ownership of their project based teaching interventions. Staff who share their experiences in TEL with the University community serve as role models, empowering other staff to develop their own good practice.

Our experience has been that this type of synergy is very sustainable and scalable. The training responsibilities were already part of our central remit. All that is required is continued maintenance of Nexus and communication between PGCTHE and E-Learning Support staff.

The lesson we have learned is that synergy between E-Learning Support and PGCTHE staff has visible benefits for the whole University. To be honest, there is nothing significant that we, in E-Learning Support, would do differently. We are quite happy with the way these programmes have developed and hope to continue in the current mode of operation.

**Future developments**

Plans for the future include further development of Nexus with new case studies derived from PGCTHE teaching cycles, learning and teaching enhancement fund projects, and awards for excellence in learning and teaching.

The brown bag talks that were piloted in December 2010 are being instituted as a series of regular presentations throughout 2011/12. Academic staff have already come forward to speak in the series, and the first few sessions have been timetabled. We expect to continue the series for the foreseeable future.

Jo Maddern has led a complete revamping of the PGCTHE programme, which will further deepen our synergy. Since the PGCTHE has now been running for over a decade, an impact analysis with a view to refreshing the programme was carried out. Accordingly, interviews were held with mentors and programme participants. A task group of Heads of Department and Directors of Learning and Teaching was convened to canvass views about how the programme could be further enhanced. The key features of the enhanced programme will include increased use of technology in teaching the scheme itself, for instance:

- The use of AberLearn Blackboard to deliver key components to participants.
- The use of wikis as part of the course assessment, where participants create a survival guide to teaching.
- The use of an online private journal to capture the assessed reflective diaries that will form a major component of the new course.
- The use of Flip digital camcorders and lecture capture using Panopto CourseCast for participants to record themselves teaching as a way of facilitating self reflection.
- Electronic submission of all assessed elements.

Thus, participants will gain an understanding of the student experience of TEL.
Equally significantly, the radical restructuring of the PGCTHE programme has involved a decision to embed TEL considerations even more closely at the heart of the programme. The taught element will teach key pedagogical principles, theories, and ideas alongside the technological tools that may help academic staff achieve these ideals in their teaching. For instance, a focus on student centred learning can be illustrated by looking at the technologies such as wikis, blogs, and Qwizdom interactive voting systems that support such learning.

The digitisation project will be ongoing, and provides a valuable and searchable resource of TEL projects, available online to those outside as well inside the university.

Transferability

This approach would be easy for other institutions to implement, providing that both E-Learning staff and the PGCTHE Coordinator or equivalent have a common vision. Willingness to engage in dialogue and transparency about processes is crucial. It may sound obvious, but for coordination to work, each side must be willing to listen to the other and not be afraid to change and adapt.

Our recommendation is to begin by bringing E-Learning and PGCTHE staff together for a discussion of teaching philosophy. Examine processes to identify where TEL can be embedded into the normal activity of the PGCTHE, and how information from PGCTHE candidates can be shared more widely to enhance TEL training. Before deciding how best to proceed, also look at examples from the higher education sector within and outside the UK and consider your own institutional context.

Very little additional staff time is required to implement this type of synergy, but the benefits of increased coordination are great.

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9 How to embed technology enhanced learning into higher education? Effective dissemination and recognition

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Abstract

Recognition and dissemination have been key to engaging academics with Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) in the Faculty of Science at Kingston University. Annual learning and teaching events provide recognition and a dissemination platform for TEL projects. This, in turn, provides inspiration for further projects and an opportune stage for discussing ideas. Further support comes from a revised model of technology support for academics and Faculty's senior management. One reason for the combined success of these strategies is that supporting TEL projects has helped address real challenges faced by academics. This case study highlights best practice in carrying out the aforementioned approaches.

Introduction

The Faculty of Science at Kingston University is a dynamic and forward looking faculty with 116 academic staff and over 3,700 students (2010 data). Technology is widely incorporated in pedagogy across the Faculty to enhance the student learning experience. Although technology enhanced teaching practice was introduced as early as 2003, its adoption has been gradual and gained momentum only recently after changes to policies and procedures as well as in resourcing and dissemination models. This case study is going to provide an overview of these changes and how the Faculty has arrived at its current models of best practice.

Background

The benefits of technology enhanced learning and teaching are well documented (HEFCE 2011, JISC 2008). In view of this, Kingston University has laid strong emphasis on TEL in its Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) strategy (Kingston University, 2009). As TEL features prominently in the LTA strategy, the Faculty now has a dedicated E-learning team, comprising a Blended Learning Leader (responsible for providing leadership and management of the Faculty’s E-learning activity) and an Academic E-developer (responsible for design and development of e-learning content, activities and assessment).

This E-learning team was formed in 2007 following a review of the Faculty’s existing resourcing models, policies and procedures. The review noted the observed pedagogic benefits and advantages of blended approaches to learning and teaching and identified several areas within the Faculty that could be supported. These included electronic resources on maths for life scientists, replacement of face to face lectures on a Chemistry first year module with self study resources and a repository of laboratory techniques’ videos for Chemistry.

Simultaneously, it soon became evident that the E-learning team’s main task was to raise awareness and interest about the services it offered and to showcase past projects. Initially, an email was sent to all academic staff highlighting the TEL projects carried out in the Faculty and calling for new projects. Some staff were also contacted following a recommendation from the Faculty’s L&T committee. However, progress was slow as these academic staff often could not devote the time to devise and provide content.

The E-learning team also started a quarterly electronic newsletter, distributed to academics via email during less busy periods of the academic year. This contained news and information about e-learning projects carried out in the Faculty and the wider HE world, forthcoming e-learning workshops/training events, a featured e-learning tool, tips and tricks, and open educational resources (OERs) related to scientific disciplines. Access statistics for the newsletter were disappointingly low suggesting this technology driven approach (emails) may have been deemed to be a low priority. The newsletter was thus discontinued after two editions.

New funding and dissemination models

In 2009–2010, HEFCE introduced a new targeted funding allocation to provide additional support for Teaching Enhancement and Student Success (TESS). The Faculty saw the new funding regime as an opportunity to review its existing models and practices because of an increasing recognition that devising innovative teaching approaches and
blended learning resources required a substantial time commitment. Therefore, a pot of £5,000 from TESS funding was created to support blended learning projects via buying out teaching time for staff, equipment and resources, remunerating student volunteers helping with the project and for evaluation and dissemination of work.

To facilitate use of this pot, academics were able to apply for funding at any point during the academic year provided the funds were utilised before the end of academic year. In addition, the application form was kept short requiring only a one page summary of the intended project and associated costs. Funding was conditional on having a plan to evaluate the project and subsequently disseminate outcomes within the Faculty.

There is, however, one caveat with this. Funding to buy out staff time may not work for some academics as the nature of their responsibilities is such that these cannot be delegated to others. Workload models may also need to change to acknowledge time engaged with pedagogical projects and research.

Models of dissemination were also reviewed in light of ineffective dissemination strategies adopted previously. A new approach was devised based around three key interventions: 1. an annual L&T event, 2. a new model of technology support for academic staff, and 3. rally senior management and School/Faculty committees’ support.

1. Annual Learning and Teaching event
In order to raise awareness of issues and good practice in pedagogy across the Faculty, £1,500 from TESS were allocated for the organisation of an annual L&T event at the end of the academic year. The funding paid for catering costs (morning and afternoon tea/biscuits and lunch).

35 academics attended the first L&T event (May 2010). There were a total of six presentations, five of which related to technology enhanced LTA. These comprised a showcase of e-learning content and resources developed by the E-learning team, technology enhanced assessment and feedback and an overview of latest developments and trends in educational technology (e.g. social media). These presentations encouraged academic staff to initiate six TESS funded e-learning projects during the 2010/11 academic year, namely:

- using videos with voiceovers to provide instant feedback for formative online assessments;
- a multimedia based guide on specialised lab equipment for research students;
- an online workshop in preparation for a laboratory practical;
- exploring the potential of social media, web based and personal technologies in the learning and teaching of Nutrition;
- a study resource on Pharmacy comprising multimedia content (tutorials, lectures, short films) on topics students need referral to throughout their course; and
- a semi-automated model for returning digital assignments (in MS Word) to students with feedback provided using Track Changes feature.

Evaluation to assess impact and effectiveness of the aforementioned projects was carried out after their completion and delivery. Criteria for evaluation included usability, clarity, accessibility and pedagogic value. Evaluations were led by the E-learning team and constituted a range of evaluation methods including student questionnaires, student focus groups and analysis of usage statistics. Students’ feedback to nearly all the projects was overwhelmingly positive. Valuable suggestions were also provided for the improvement of these projects. Student feedback reinforced the benefits afforded by TEL e.g. flexibility, personalisation and instant feedback.

These projects were showcased with their initial/final evaluation at the second L&T event (May 2011) attended by 48 academics. Some of this work has also been presented at various national conferences related to TEL (Barra, 2011; Barra and Usman, 2011a; Barra and Usman, 2011b; Usman, 2011), support for which has come from the Faculty. This has helped in raising the Faculty’s and University’s profile. So far, six new e-learning projects are in planning stage.

As evidence of the success of L&T events, more academic staff have attended these compared to those who viewed the newsletter and replied to emails combined. This may have come as a result of i) time of the year event is organised (following last week of teaching), and ii) having an entire away day off site, in different surroundings, without distraction from day to day responsibilities.

Most importantly, the away days have inspired academics to initiate new TEL projects. This is because the projects showcased at the event have helped address real challenges faced by academics rather than merely adding technological bells and whistles to learning and teaching activities. These challenges include assessment and feedback, large cohorts and diverse academic backgrounds which most attendees could relate to. Successful results from evaluations of showcased projects have also reinforced positive views of TEL. As an aside, it has been observed that providing attendees with paper copies of the presentations is not only useful for note taking but is more likely to be referred back to compared to an electronic version of the presentation emailed or placed on the staff intranet.
By providing a platform for dissemination, the learning and teaching events also offer recognition for academics’ work and incentive for further work. Further recognition comes from the University’s learning and teaching awards (including an award for best TEL project) and internal learning and teaching publications which are disseminated to the whole of the University and partner institutions. Moreover, the events also created an opportunity for those attendees who are engaged in TEL activities on their own to share and discuss their experiences and the problems they faced. The discussions helped the E-learning team identify areas where it could support academics (e.g. computer based formative/summative assessments).

The learning and teaching events have set the momentum for the wider adoption of technology enhanced learning and teaching within the Faculty where projects commenced after one annual event may then be presented at subsequent events.

2. New model of technology support for academic staff

The Faculty’s Blended Learning Policy requires all academic staff to use, as an absolute minimum, the institutional VLE (Blackboard) in some form. Therefore, the aspect of TEL that academics would be most interested in is support for use of the VLE, which is the remit of a central department called the Academic Development Centre (ADC). However, the ADC is located on a different site and staff tend to prefer face to face training rather than being referred to online manuals. Thus, the E-learning team decided to provide some of this support and training with a view to using the contact opportunity to introduce academic staff to other aspects of their work, such as technology enhanced L&T (VLE and non-VLE based).

Over the last two years, a significant number of academic staff have approached the E-learning team for VLE and related support. With a view to earn their goodwill, academics were usually accommodated any time of the day; their urgency was given priority and unexpected arrival seen as an opportunity. Prompt support was greatly appreciated by academics and there was a noticeable increase in staff approaching the E-learning team through word of mouth.

This approach has been successful in the promotion and uptake of technology supported formative and summative assessments and has resulted in ten activities on assessment and feedback involving eight academics during the 2010/11 academic year. However, attempting to influence academics to adapt a technology enhanced approach to learning and teaching is not without its caveats as it could be seen as delving into the academic’s territory. Therefore, subtlety during initial meetings is essential to demonstrate acknowledgement of academics expertise and make them more receptive to new ideas (expressions such as you are the expert and I see your point were often used).

3. Rally senior management and School/Faculty committees’ support

Senior members of the Faculty (e.g. Dean, Associate Dean, Heads of Schools) have the best overall view of the strengths and weaknesses of the Faculty. Therefore, the E-learning team liaised with them to identify modules and courses where TEL could be potentially relevant and academics who were perceived to be enthusiastic. This approach was beneficial in, for example, identifying modules that could benefit from the inclusion of subject specific open educational resources discovered by the E-learning team.

Furthermore, each of the three schools of the Faculty has an academic representative in various Faculty committees and School meetings. These representatives are in an excellent position to publicise the Faculty’s E-learning initiatives and the call for new projects (as demonstrated by their success in publicising and successfully attracting academics to an upcoming project on plagiarism following a request from the E-learning team). This will be explored again in the future for dissemination of E-learning work.

Future developments

Academics are less likely to be aware of the range of available technologies, advantages/disadvantages and suitability of technology for the problem at hand. In view of this, in future L&T events the E-learning team will ask academics to fill in a quick questionnaire to identify the challenges they face in their teaching and any aspect(s) of their teaching that they would like to change. The E-learning team will then examine the submissions and identify whether technology could help to tackle the issues raised.

Emails may not be the best medium for publicising and disseminating TEL. In house anecdotal evidence suggests that paper based communication has a greater chance of being read/used. The E-learning team intends to re-launch the newsletter and disseminate forthcoming E-learning training events in paper form in staff pigeon holes. The proposed monthly newsletter will take the form of a leaflet comprising one side of an A4 paper and is going to provide quick, digestible information on a single topic related to TEL. Where email is the most appropriate means of communication, the E-learning team intends to ask senior members of the Faculty to send these on its behalf as they are less likely to get ignored.

The E-learning team intends to approach academics who have taken the University’s Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) for cold calling for future projects as they are generally perceived to be more receptive to exploring TEL. In fact, the PGCLTHE curriculum lays significant emphasis on technology enhanced L&T and a significant number of course activities involve the use of learning technology.
Conclusion

Academics are part of teaching/course teams and they can champion TEL through their own practice to other academics who may be more likely to listen to them. Rather than making the use of TEL a tick box exercise, one should attempt to inspire academics to use TEL.

Dissemination of academics' work via the learning and teaching away days as well as the ability to buy out their time to dedicate to the developmental work provides recognition of the time and effort necessary for ensuring technology really enhances student learning. Workload models, when available, may need to change to further recognise time engaged with pedagogical projects and research.

In addition, positive student feedback acts as a further incentive for staff to start or continue exploring technology, which may ultimately impact on National Student Survey scores. This emphasises the importance of evaluating the impact of TEL projects.

HEFCE allocates funding under the TESS scheme to the entire HE sector to support institutional L&T strategies. HE institutions intending to emulate the practice mentioned in this case study can, like Kingston University, direct funding from their TESS allocation to support educational technology projects and dissemination. In the current climate of funding cuts to higher education, rising student fees and increased expectation for use of TEL by digital natives (Prensky 2001), universities need to push on the use of TEL whilst becoming smarter in the way they allocate direct resources to support learning and teaching.

This case study highlighted several approaches to engage academics with TEL. Effective dissemination and recognition are key to embedding TEL into HE. Don’t TEL academics what to do... a little nudge will do...

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NB
From 1st August 2011, the Faculty of Science merged with the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Computing, Information Systems and Maths (CISM) to form a new Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing (SEC). This case study refers to activities and events prior to this date.
Abstract

The Write-TEL project sought to provide a well structured, online supported opportunity for a group of educators from different institutions to write up one of their own technology enhanced learning (TEL) initiatives as the focus of their first publication in this area, and to learn about the TEL work of others in the process. The evaluation undertaken to date has highlighted the effectiveness of Write-TEL in several key areas, while also identifying enhancements that should strengthen the nature and transferability of the approach.

Background and rationale

This case study describes an online staff development initiative setup to support scholarly writing in technology enhanced learning (TEL), and to explore the possibilities for fostering the development of online scholarly writing networks for educators yet to disseminate their TEL work through peer reviewed publication. Write-TEL (Writing for Publication in Technology Enhanced Learning) originated within Edinburgh Napier’s MSc Blended and Online Education (MSc BOE), which is a fully online programme for educators interested in exploring TEL in their own professional practice.

Within the context of the module Customised Study for Blended and Online Education, which first ran in 2009, several participants on the MSc BOE expressed an interest in writing up projects or initiatives they undertook as part of their coursework for the programme, or which were partially supported through their work on programme, for publication through a relevant journal or peer reviewed conference. This was enabled on the Customised Study module through an approach that involved participants negotiating with their Personal Development Tutor (PDT) a focus and outlet for their work, and a plan of activity including further research or evaluation, drafting, review, and preparation for submission to a suitable peer reviewed conference or journal. One of the co-authors of this case study, in the role of programme leader and PDT, facilitated this process while another of the co-authors provided expert input into the process via an online workshop exploring key issues in writing for publication in the area of technology enhanced learning. The above approach proved successful, and several of the cohort for the first run of the module had full papers accepted for presentation at international conferences and publication in associated peer reviewed proceedings (as detailed in Smyth, 2009). When the second run of the module resulted in further papers being accepted for publication, a commitment was made to explore how to broaden this work to encourage other educators to write their first TEL related publication.

The rationale that underpinned the development of Write-TEL as an extension to the work described above had local and wider dimensions. For Edinburgh Napier there was an opportunity to strengthen pedagogic research activity and research:teaching linkages internally, as well as disseminating good practice in TEL within the institution. However, in recognising the interest across the sector to support scholarship in learning, teaching and assessment, the emergent ethos of openness within TEL as a field, and also current interest in digital scholarship and technology supported staff development, it was agreed early on that any broadening of the work undertaken to date should also offer opportunities to interested colleagues beyond Edinburgh Napier and the MSc BOE programme.

Approach and resourcing

The authors planned Write-TEL as a series of four synchronous ninety minute writing for publication workshops, one each month from April to July 2011, interspersed with online writing and peer review activities (for example posting and commenting on paper abstracts, structures, and initial drafts). The workshops were structured around the themes, Preparing to write for publication, Writing for your chosen outlet, Drafting and review and Preparing for submission, and were run through the virtual classroom environment, Elluminate.

The structure of each workshop followed the same general pattern, whereby an introduction to the workshop’s theme and learning outcomes was followed by short segments of presenter led exploration of key topics and issues, with group discussion and exploration (e.g. of example abstracts, draft paper structures, and published papers) in between.
Each workshop concluded with a *What’s next* overview relating to the writing tasks and online peer review activities to be undertaken after the workshop in question. The online peer activities, access to previous workshop recordings, and general online support was enabled through a Write-TEL group space created within the Edinburgh Napier Education Exchange (Figure 1) – an ELGG based social networking platform developed to support online sharing and staff development in learning and teaching.

Central to the Write-TEL process was the availability of individual support to each participant, provided by one of the three Write-TEL facilitators who acted in a *critical friend* role to help participants find a focus and outlet, and to review their work in progress.

Write-TEL was purposefully limited in numbers, originally to twelve places of which six were to be offered internally within Edinburgh Napier and six externally. The interest in Write-TEL led to 16 places being offered, with seven being taken by Edinburgh Napier staff and the remaining nine by a range of colleagues geographically dispersed amongst HE and FE institutions across the UK and further afield. All participants were active in technology enhanced learning, either in the context of their own discipline related teaching or in staff development roles. However, with the exception of two participants, including one who was also online as an observer with a view to helping support future iterations of Write-TEL, none of the participants had published their TEL related work through peer reviewed channels. It is also important to acknowledge that while all of those who came forward to participate in Write-TEL had at least some experience in implementing TEL initiatives in their own teaching or education related work, levels of experience varied greatly from those were currently in the midst of their first initiative through to those who were more experienced but seeking specific support in writing up their work. For around half the group, Write-TEL was their first experience of participating in any kind of online staff development initiative.

In terms of resourcing, Write-TEL was funded through a £3000 Teaching Fellows Grant applied for internally within Edinburgh Napier. The majority of the funding was used to buy in external expertise from one of the co-authors in writing and delivering Write-TEL, as well as in providing some of the one to one support available. The substantive content and teaching materials have now been developed, so costs for future iterations of Write-TEL will be limited to minor revisions of content, workshop delivery, ongoing tutor support and, as detailed further on, to hopefully extending Write-TEL to involve more institutions and participants.

**Evaluation and impact**

At the time of writing, the online activities for Write-TEL have been completed and almost all of the participants who completed Write-TEL (thirteen of the original sixteen) have tangible published outputs. Others are working towards this, with the continued help of their assigned *critical friend*. Evaluation is also ongoing, and is about to enter a qualitative evaluation stage involving interviews and the thematic analysis of interview data to allow the authors to understand the nature, challenges and benefits of the Write-TEL experience for participants.
The qualitative evaluation about to be undertaken has been preceded by an online evaluation survey combining Likert scale and a series of open ended questions. Nine of the 13 participants who completed Write-TEL have responded to the survey. Overall the results are very encouraging, while also highlighting areas for enhancement for future iterations of Write-TEL that will be explored further during the interviews with participants.

At a broad level, all participants agreed that the scheduling of the monthly online workshops was about right. Several participants also commented on the regular slot for the workshops, which took place in the afternoon of the first Friday of each month. This time was chosen as one that it was felt would most likely fit in around teaching commitments, and which would also be easily remembered. This was borne out in the feedback received, with one participant explaining “The workshops were well timed and easy to schedule mentally, much more than if they had been timed for, say, some date in the middle of the month”.

Figure 2: virtual tour of a paper as part of Workshop 3: Drafting and Review

In terms of the workshop duration, seven of those who completed the survey felt that 90 minutes was about right, with two indicating they felt that this was too long. The workshops were all well attended with a minimum of 11 of the group joining each session, and typically for the duration except where occasionally someone had to join late or leave slightly early. In combining presentation, exploration of examples, and opportunities for open mic and text based discussion the workshops became extremely interactive, and resulted in the sharing and contrasting of individual experiences of TEL initiatives undertaken including pedagogic approaches, evaluation methods employed, and findings (Figure 2 above). There is scope here to explore how best to further support these kinds of exchanges in future iterations of Write-TEL, which was primarily focused on the process of writing for publication.

For the facilitators the level of activity was at times challenging to harness, even with one facilitator presenting, one keeping time and moderating contributions, and one taking notes. The high levels of interactivity in the sessions did not seem to be an issue for participants, although in shaping how Write-TEL may run in the future then options around an increased number of shorter workshops over a slightly longer period may be considered, as well as making more use of the breakout room feature within Elluminate to manage activity.

In terms of workshop content, then as indicated in Table 1 this was well received and the majority indicated that they had found the content of each workshop extremely useful.
While the other activities featured in Write-TEL were also positively valued (Table 2), there is less strength of agreement concerning the value of the online tasks featured between workshops. Participation in these was not consistent, and only a small core of five or six participants undertook the majority of tasks involving peer review of abstracts, and sharing paper outlines. As one participant commented very fairly “The online tasks were good as they kept pressure on me to keep up with the programme. I was disappointed in the lack of peer engagement, and felt that this bit offered much that wasn’t realised”. This is a key area to be explored within the interviews, and the duality many experienced around the online tasks (i.e. that they encouraged engagement but did not deliver as fully as intended on the peer support side) will be addressed in planning for the next delivery of Write-TEL. The authors also need to explore the negative critical friend experience for one participant!

Table 1: How useful did you find the Elluminate workshops? (* combined categories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No/limited value *</th>
<th>Fairly useful</th>
<th>Extremely useful</th>
<th>Did not participate/watch recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing to write for publication (1 April)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for your chosen outlet (6 May)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting and review (3 June)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for submission (1 July)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: What elements of the Write-TEL programme do you value?

In exploring the impact on knowledge and skills developed through Write-TEL, the response from participants has been extremely encouraging. Participants were invited to indicate what they felt were the three most important things they had learned from their engagement with Write-TEL. An illustrative selection of the learning gains identified by participants included:

“The value in sharing ideas and collaborating, especially in an e-way!”
“Developing a structure and using it helps make sure gaps are minimised.”
“Pacing the writing (chunking), paper structure, purpose and audience.”
“How (or that) journals differ so much in their approaches.”
“Choosing your journal or conference is very strategic.”
“That getting a poster or paper accepted at a conference is a good first step.”
“Importance of researching where to submit and being aware of author guidelines.”
“Opportunity to learn more about writing for publication and develop the necessary skills through actually writing a paper for publication.”
“It boosted my confidence. I now feel that I can do it and will continue writing, knowing that there will be bad days and good days.”
Perhaps most telling are the responses received when participants were asked to summarise the general impact of Write-TEL on their scholarly writing. One participant’s comment captured nicely the entire point of the Write-TEL initiative in stating that it “Has significantly moved me forward from believing I could be a published scholar to actually being one”, while another participant captured a number of responses in explaining:

“I now feel more capable and confident. I feel that I am developing some of the skills needed and am more aware of how to do it. I know that this is a journey and I am prepared to learn more. Everybody else is writing, why shouldn’t I? If I have something special to share, I should use this as an opportunity to connect with others and discuss my experiments and findings if I want to learn more...Thanks again for this excellent programme!”

Published and other outputs

While a small number of participants are still being supported in finalising their written work, at the current time published or peer reviewed outputs resulting from Write-TEL includes:

- Three papers accepted for publication in the proceedings of the 10th European Conference on e-Learning (ECEL2011) to be held in the UK in November.
- One short paper presented at the recent ALT-C 2011 Conference.
- Two recently completed final drafts ready for submission to chosen journals.
- Short paper presented at an internal conference on learning and teaching.
- Conference poster with follow up written paper about to be undertaken.

The TEL related topics covered across the work above includes enhancements to classroom based teaching practice, student and staff adoption of educational technology, design of collaborative cross cohort projects, and game based learning. In addition, two participants plan to submit chapter proposals for a forthcoming edited book, while a requirement of participating in Write-TEL was for each participant to produce a short case study for publication in Edinburgh Napier’s LTA Resource Bank (Edinburgh Napier University, 2011) – thus ensuring at least one published output for all.

Problems encountered and lessons learnt

The main lesson learned is that the format for Write-TEL, expanded from the original work undertaken on the MSc BOE, works well. The sequencing and content of the monthly workshops, supported by critical friend input for each participant, is an effective model. It is also a model that is arguably transferable to other discipline areas, and several of the participants indicated that they felt the approach could be easily replicated to support colleagues in scholarly writing in their own subject areas or adapted to provide a technology enhanced means of supporting Masters and research students in writing up dissertations. There are caveats, and certainly providing individual critical friend support would become difficult with larger groups. Here, however, the use of peer mentor groups, or using those who have already been through Write-TEL as the critical friends, become more scalable alternatives to the lead facilitators providing all of the critical friend input.

Key to the transferability of the Write-TEL process as it has been described here is the creation of time and space to engage in scholarly activity in an online context, and here we have seen that the benefits that are brought to staff by the opportunity to engage flexibly in online supported staff development in TEL practice (Littlejohn, 2002; Smyth, 2009; Macdonald and Campbell, 2010) can also effectively support scholarly activity.

One final important outcome of Write-TEL as a project, and an area for further development, is in helping participants make more informed choices about how they may use technology enhanced approaches in their own teaching and student support activities. Write-TEL deliberately sought to engage educators in an authentic TEL experience, albeit with a particular focus on scholarly writing in the area of TEL, but the approach taken including the tools used did encourage participants to reflect on their own use of TEL and consider how this might be enhanced. The use of Elluminate as a virtual classroom technology, for example, was new to many of the participants who subsequently came to identify how they in turn could use it to support meaningful activities for their own students. Similarly, the peer review of abstracts and papers provided a valuable opportunity for at least some participants to read and learn about how others in different subject areas were implementing TEL. How to further support good practice sharing will be an important issue taking Write-TEL forward.
Future developments

The authors are planning a second iteration of Write-TEL for early Spring 2012, subject to funding which is currently being applied for. The intention is to build upon the lessons learnt in the areas highlighted above, while also making improvements in the way that the online environment in Edinburgh Napier Education Exchange is used, for example, to bring in notifications of new online posts that may better support peer to peer exchanges. Currently, also being explored is the possibility to run Write-TEL across a number of partner institutions, in order to improve support and outreach for interested participants.

![Write-TEL Workshop Recordings](http://www.edunapier.ac.uk/services/academicdevelopment/LTA/resources/Pages/resources.aspx)

Figure 3: links to recordings of Write-TEL workshops (open access)

While Write-TEL has focused on supporting scholarly writing in the area of technology enhanced learning, as indicated the authors believe the format could easily support writing for publication in any discipline area – particularly for new researchers or academics new to writing for publication. Write-TEL, in a similar format to that described here, also has further potential as a means of sharing good practice in TEL across disciplines. Whether for adaptation or reuse, the authors are committed to openly sharing the format, lessons learnt and resources from Write-TEL (see Figure 3) of which this case study is a first step.

References

Edinburgh Napier University (2011). *LTA Resource Bank*. [online] Available at: [http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/academicdevelopment/LTA/resources/Pages/resources.aspx](http://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/academicdevelopment/LTA/resources/Pages/resources.aspx) [Accessed 31 August 2011]


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