

E-Learning and E-Knowledge Strategy 2006-9

1. Context

- 1.1 This document sets out the University of Nottingham's strategy for e-learning for the period 2006-08 and is in response to the HEFCE policy document *HEFCE Strategy for e-learning* (March 2005/12). While not directly required by the HEFCE policy paper, setting out a clear statement of the aims and objectives does provide a clear indication of what the University of Nottingham aims to achieve in a key element of the teaching and learning environment in higher education.
- 1.2 The University of Nottingham has sought to promote a high quality teaching and learning environment at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels by investing significantly in its technological infrastructure over the last ten years. This investment was necessary to provide the basis for effective development and implementation of e-learning across all its curricula, campuses and modes of delivery.
- 1.3 The University faces considerable challenges in maintaining and promoting excellence in teaching and learning including: increasing student numbers; diversity in approaches to learning; increase in the numbers of students who have a disability; high expectations and prior experience of technology among students; delivery across international campuses; increased competitiveness in the international student market; training needs of postgraduates. The University regards e-learning as a key instrument with which to enrich the learning experiences for all its students during their studies, whether taught or research based, and also provides a flexible means of dealing with many of the pressures it faces now and in the future.
- 1.4 A key element of the changing environment is the nature of the student intake and their expectations of the learning environment in which they will study. In particular, the way in they interact with the world around them through technology, much of which is mobile, influences the way they perceive and react to their environment. Increasingly, students come to university having been exposed to a range of e-learning modes and thus expect this to continue during their degrees. Further, students enrolling on postgraduate programmes (taught and research) come from a variety of institutions and they might have experienced e-learning tools in their previous studies and thus again have raised expectations of what Nottingham might have to offer too. Discerning what student expectations are, through focus group engagement, and how best to react to them will inform our approaches to developing e-learning. In addition, students will increasingly employ technology to adapt and create their own learning environments and activities. Being able to respond to and

support this student-centred activity is a party of the e-learning strategy.

- 1.5 Given the strategic importance of postgraduate study and the subsequent expansion of student numbers it is vital to the success of the e-learning strategy that research training and support issues are given prominence. This is particularly germane within the context of multi-campus supervision of research students and for multi-site research activity.
- 1.6 In addition, ongoing monitoring of e-learning initiatives at competitor institutions both nationally and internationally will act to inform and benchmark activities at Nottingham. Trends in current national activity are not clearly defined but most universities in the Russell Group are focused more on embedding e-learning within a blended approach to delivering teaching and learning and less with the development of entire distance learning courses. Internationally, there appears to more evidence of both distance course development and blended learning in competitor countries. It is clear, however, that to maintain a competitive edge, the University of Nottingham must remain aware of trends and approaches appearing in the HE sector
- 1.7 The funding for the activities proposed in the following paragraphs comes from HEFCE and the entire e-learning strategy should be considered as integrated with the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy, Information Services Strategy and Internationalisation Strategy.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aim

The overall aim of this strategy is:

To develop the University's reputation for teaching and learning excellence by harnessing information and communications technologies to enhance the ways in which students learn and academic staff teach.

2.2 Objectives

To achieve this aim there are a number of objectives that should be met over the next three years:

- Develop e-learning initiatives to support internationalisation in general, and overseas campuses in particular, as well as to support the Postgraduate Strategy.
- Increase awareness of, interest in and use of e-learning for on and near campus students and for distance learning.

- In devising new approaches to the use of e-learning to ensure issues of inclusion are given consideration and in doing so support the Widening Participation strategy.
- Trial and evaluate innovative mechanisms for delivering e-learning ensuring these are accessible to students who have a disability
- Support research into the impact of the sponsored projects

3. Mechanisms to Deliver the Strategy

- 3.1 To deliver the specified aims and objectives, the University's e-learning strategy will focus on targeted investment of resource (both technical support and resources for the provision of content) to a small number of strategically significant projects which will provide a base for the transfer of expertise and best practice throughout the university.
- 3.2 The selection of these projects will be based on the potential to deliver key areas of the e-learning strategy. While the dominant focus will be on the embedding of e-learning for on campus students, market trends and the needs of the University's internationalisation strategy suggest that projects that provide for remote delivery or otherwise support internationalisation should be an important element in the e-learning portfolio (such as research student training or supervision as well as delivery of taught courses at different campuses). Given the significant fixed costs associated with the development of e-learning materials, particular attention will be paid to exploiting the potential for re-useability.
- 3.3 In order to raise the profile of the University in this area it is also proposed to integrate an open courseware project as part of the e-learning strategy. The University of Nottingham Open CourseWare (u-Now) project will make selected e-learning material publicly available to prospective students, other institutions and other academics much in the same way (and with a similar expected set of benefits) as Universities such as MIT, Carnegie-Mellon and Rice. Although a number of leading Universities worldwide are engaged in this type of activity, there is no evidence of any of the leading UK universities adopting this approach. The benefits of u-Now arise from its potential to enhance the University's reputation for innovation, leadership and also demonstrate social responsibility. Judicious targeting of learning materials can support the development and sustainability of relationships with prospective students, alumni and other important stakeholders. Freely available teaching materials can also integrate with the capacity building element of the University's internationalisation strategy.

The specific actions required to deliver the strategy are as follows:

Management

3.3 To create a clear structure for the management and development of e-learning by:

- Allocating e-learning to be part of a PVC portfolio
- Appointing a Director of e-Learning
- Creating an e-Learning Committee with overall responsibility for the strategic direction of e-learning and representative of all key groups across the University

3.4 To ensure coherence with other University initiatives by

- Embedding the e-learning strategy within the Information Services, Teaching and Learning, Internationalisation, Postgraduate, Widening Participation Strategies and the Disability Plan
- Ensuring the Director of e-Learning is a member of key University committees
- Liaising closely with the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Learning Sciences Research Institute and the Institute for Research in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

Development of Materials

3.5 To develop existing materials by:

- Identifying strategically important courses, Schools or modules and targeting resources to support e-learning developments.
- Establishing clear criteria for targeted support which include: extent of impact on students (while recognising diversity), evidence of educational effectiveness, re-usability of materials within the School, potential for transferability to other parts of the University, impact on internationalisation and innovation and creativity.
- Exploring with Marketing and Communications any opportunities for niche course development
- Supporting schools in the process of embedding e-learning into curriculum for on or near campus students;
- Supporting programmes for the development of e-learning to serve the needs of distance students paying particular attention to synergies between distance and on campus use via elements of re-useability (or recycleability). Particular emphasis will be given to distance training and supervision of research students.

- Deepening the link with external collaborators to share and develop expertise
- Schools will be encouraged to make a selection of suitable materials available for the open courseware project.
- Considering how inclusive the new activities are and the extent to which all students can access and benefit from e-learning.

3.6 To support staff in the introduction of new e-learning activities by:

- Devising a means for evaluating which schools/disciplines should be given targeted support
- Targeted use of expertise within the IS Learning Team including the appointment of 3x3-year learning technologists, 1x2year learning technologist and 1x1 year technical support post (u-Now) to focus specifically on initiatives developed as part of this strategy all of whom will have knowledge of accessibility issues.
- Ensuring ongoing liaison between schools and the Director of e-Learning
- Exploring the use of "teaching leaves"/"teaching assistants" to encourage investment in training and materials development
- Making explicit the potential rewards of such activities to staff
- Dissemination of exemplars from across the University and developing approaches with schools which improve the effectiveness of e-learning
- Liaising with SEDU to identify opportunities for training

Communication

3.7 To create effective and constructive information flows about e-learning across the University and through the Director of e-Learning by

- Communicating with Heads of School personally or in plenary sessions such as Heads of School meetings or Senate
- Talking to groups of academics at "away days" and through the Teaching and Learning Conferences
- Making presentations to new PGCHE cohorts
- Linking to existing networks where e-learning is discussed such as the e-Learning Community, including subject librarians.

- Provision of case material for PESL website

3.8 To disseminate widely knowledge about e-learning activity by

- Creating a network of e-learning advocates from across schools
- Disseminating good practice to the rest of the University via the PESL website and through e-mail alerts and newsletters
- Exploiting current external linkages (U21G, Russell Group etc) to promote activity at Nottingham
- Liaising with Marketing and Communications to exploit further internal and external dissemination opportunities
- Promoting and encouraging use of u-Now resources among prospective students, applicants, alumni and partner universities overseas.

Research

3.9 To develop and enhance research and innovation in e-learning by

- Encouraging and promoting the research programmes of the LSRI and IRLTHE
- Adopting a research-led approach to innovative uses of e-learning
- Provision of support and guidance to those involved in projects to enable them to evaluate the impact of their e-learning initiatives.
- Ensuring regular liaison between the Director of e-Learning, the Directors of LSRI and IRLTHE and the Head of the IS Learning Team.
- Exploiting the opportunities offered by the Ningbo campus and the e-China project including the establishment of a branch of the LSRI in China

Infrastructure

3.10 To establish an IT resource-rich environment in which e-learning can flourish by:

- Continued investment in the technological infrastructure from IS resources to deliver the connected campus at both home and abroad
- Supporting the development of the Learning Hub
- Ensuring that e-books, e-journals and other electronic library materials are easily accessible alongside e-learning materials in the learning environment

- Providing support for students on low incomes to use e-learning through, for example, expanding computer facilities on campus

Evaluation

3.12 To ensure regular and effective evaluation of the impact of e-learning is undertaken by:

- Establishing a clear process of ongoing evaluation of projects, drawing on the rich research and practical experience in the LSRI and IRLTHE
- Utilising a case-study approach to evaluating the projects undertaken
- Publication of regular reports by the Director of e-Learning outlining the results of the evaluation
- Gathering information on entrants/applicants expectations and experiences of e-learning (via, for example, the student survey, SET and SEM etc and from research activities in the wider University community)

3.13 Key Performance Indicators will be

- Numbers of modules and students affected
- Development of new courses
- Student evaluations (Student Survey)
- Module quality (SEM)

3.14 Specific milestones to monitor the implementation process are

- Appointment of E-Learning Director (by February 2006)
- Establishment of E-Learning/E-Knowledge committee (by January 2006)
- Appointment of Learning Technologists (by March 2006)
- Establish metrics (by April 2006)
- Start-up projects (by June 2006)
- Year 1 project outcomes (by September 2006)
- Year 2 project outcomes (by September 2007)
- Year 3 project outcomes (by September 2008)

CWM/CTE
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