ePioneers: Taking ownership of e-learning
A balanced account of capacity building

Audit interviews: questions and findings

An independent researcher was not a solution, as this Group needed to carry out the research. However, it was accepted that the existing relationship between interviewer and interviewee would mean different responses may result.

Six colleagues were interviewed and 4 key questions were raised.

Interview questions:

1. What do you understand by e-learning?
2. What is happening in your area of responsibility?
3. What other areas /colleagues work are you aware of in the School/University?
4. Where would you like us to be in 5 years time?
5. Any other comments

Findings: Extract from minutes of ELSG meeting of 20th May 2005

2. Review and update of work in progress

Everyone had interviewed their contacts, and Elaine had interviewed three people. The taped interviews were on the eLearning Drive, and would be accompanied by the summary sheets.

The following issues had been raised:
- Awareness and use of e-learning and technology varied considerably, although most interviewees were receptive to learning more and being encouraged to use it in teaching.
- Those most accustomed to using technology seemed to be most conservative about the benefits of e-learning over human interaction in teaching.
- Some courses enjoyed great benefits, with students able to communicate easily and share data between meetings.
- There was concern that established pedagogies were being emulated on-line, when in fact there was more of a challenge to develop pedagogies in a different way.
- There was concern that discussions about on-line pedagogy were taking place in teams, but this group was not included.
- There was frustration as staff did not have time with their present commitments to develop on-line work or embrace new technology. These were staff development and management issues to be resolved.
- Concerns were raised about the practicalities of making on-line learning work, eg licences.
- Time, money and administrative cost were raised as potential barriers.
- Staff would like to see incremental growth of modules using or supported by e-learning.

++ This document is intended to be read as part of the ePioneers website ++
ePioneers: Taking ownership of e-learning
www.nottingham.ac.uk/epioneers/

- Age of student body might affect receptiveness to new technologies.
- Some interviewees had a narrow view of e-learning, and could only see its implications for them as individuals, not for the School or University as a whole.
- The culture of some courses was individualistic, where students were attracted by the tutor rather than the institution.
- Concerns were raised about cost, and different roles of teacher and demonstrator were considered.
- e-learning should be incidental to a course, rather than the technology driving the direction of learning.
- People felt disempowered as they lacked knowledge to use some new technology. It appeared mysterious, and was developing at a rapid rate. Some felt guilty that they lacked expertise.
- UoN had not yet reached the level of Leeds Met, where ability to use Web-CT was a core competency for all academic staff, with further training at induction to ensure standards were high.
- It was important to define what we wanted to achieve, so that the support can be set up.

How to move forward with promoting knowledge of e-learning – Master classes, drop-ins for information, but staff also need to be nurtured and encouraged so that they are comfortable and the mystique surrounding e-learning is removed.

Findings: Extract from ELSG report to School Learning & Teaching committee.

School Plan (2005)

Elearning will be developed monitored and actively promoted on a whole school level based on a five year development plan for e-learning and will include:
- Increasing the appropriate role of elearning in course conceptualization and provision
- Review of elearning to be a feature of course review
- Continually review technical support, provision and resources for enhancing elearning across the school
- Embedding elearning presence by transforming our cottage industry into cutting edge whole school initiative
- Researching our own practice

In accordance with the School Development Plan and University developments, L & T set up an e-learning subcommittee tasked to lead and explore developments in e-learning for the next five years.

It was agreed to talk to individual members of the school with a range of responsibilities to try to get a 'snapshot' of colleagues' perceptions of current e-learning capacity and how it impacts on our working lives. The interviews were carried out during May 2005 and the first analysis is now available.

The results are affirming and useful. They provide an excellent basis from which to work.

++ This document is intended to be read as part of the ePioneers website ++
ePioneers: Taking ownership of e-learning
www.nottingham.ac.uk/epioneers/

Summary

- Varying definitions of eLearning and varying understandings – depends on individual experiences and contexts in which interviewees are working.
- What is the role of the school plan - as a guide?
- Range of projects and developments but dissemination of these is sketchy. There could be more if the support and infrastructure were in place
- level of skeptical criticality in relation to the benefits of e-learning – this relates to the staff as well as student experience.
- Need for a culture change to break down barriers and we need to have a clear vision of how this will happen
- Recognition that there is a potential for further incorporation of new learning technologies as long as this is pedagogically driven.
- Recognition that new types/cohorts of students would be attracted by courses that incorporated e-learning – this was seen as being a positive move
- Recognition that there is a need for strategic support at management level in order to progress e-learning within the School, i.e. management decisions need to be made in relation to freeing staff time for developments and
- Need for an urgent review of support (in its widest sense) for developing e-learning.

Issues arising

- How can be proactive in responding to this so that the status quo is not maintained and thinking moves on? Where do we go from here?
- How can we build a whole school inclusive vision?
- What can be done to raise awareness of the potential for e-learning to improve the learning experience?
- What can be done to move the School on from a cottage industry (go it alone) approach to an effective whole School collegiate approach to developing e-learning? (At present this tends to be the realm of the enthusiastic individual rather than something the whole School of Education can embrace.)

Ways forward

- To be well prepared and proactive with regard to future action planning and funding
- Scenario Method to act as a discussion tool
- Executive involvement
- Whole staff involvement
- Action plan ready for September 2005