

The Think Tank

Making Lifelong Learning a reality



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Editors' Foreword

This publication captures the outputs of an event organised by JISC infoNet, the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) and the JISC, held in February 2005 at the Orange Studio in Birmingham. The event was entitled 'IT Won't Work Here' and it aimed to explore what is required to make Lifelong Learning a reality. The title was a play on words indicating both the need to overcome a range of negative attitudes and for the ALT and JISC communities to focus on more than simply the technology required to support learners moving across the different education sectors.

The event built on the outcomes of a JISC funded Development Programme entitled MLEs for Lifelong Learning and many examples of good practice and innovation from institutions involved in that programme were cited during the day.

To start off we invited four speakers from very different backgrounds to sum up their experiences of supporting lifelong learning and their views on key issues and you can find transcripts of those presentations towards the back of this publication. We then followed with an open forum and a debate on the topic 'Joining up learning across organisations is for the benefit of the institutions/government and not the learner' and we have also included a transcript of what was a heated and lively debate.

The main focus of the event was however a 'Think Tank' in which groups consisting of over 70 delegates and invited experts discussed the areas to be addressed to ensure effective and successful collaboration between FE and HE on e-learning and suggested practical steps to address those key areas.

The outcomes of those discussions are also reported here. There was a wide-ranging debate about approaches, terminology, funding, culture and a range of other issues but a fair degree of consensus emerged as to what are the key areas and each of the groups managed to come up with sound practical examples of ways to move forward. The event did identify significant differences in approach between FE and HE but participants showed a genuine interest in learning from one another and it was suggested we should understand and honour those differences whilst attempting to make the transition as seamless as possible for the learner.

This is only a point along the journey. JISC infoNet and ALT are taking these ideas forward and, in partnership with the JISC and the Higher Education Academy, we are running an exciting new project 'Collaborative Approaches to the Management of e-Learning' (<http://www.jiscinfonet/camel>) to develop a community of practice of those using e-learning to support lifelong learners.

We hope you find these discussions of interest and will take the opportunity to share your experiences with us at future events or via the JISC infoNet website. For those who want to find out more about JISC infoNet and ALT and how to engage with us there is a brief introduction at the back of the publication.

Gill Ferrell, JISC infoNet

Rhonda Riachi, ALT



Gill Ferrell



Rhonda Riachi



Think Tank Outcomes



You can't
change a
culture through
enthusiasts

Senior
managers can
be 'heroic'
about issues
they
understand

Leadership, Strategy and Organisational Issues

Many of the group discussions started at the top and discussed how issues of strategy and leadership impact on what we are trying to achieve.

It was recognised that the strategies of all the various stakeholder agencies are not necessarily joined up to give a coherent steer to the sector and a number of communication issues stem from the fact that there are different sector bodies working within a silo mentality. There was however some positive feeling that the new UK-wide Lifelong Learning Sector Skills Council (Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) <http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org>) should address this and help to increase communication across the sectors at a strategic level.

Some delegates wanted to see this approach taken even further and advocated a UK-wide Ministry for Life, Love and Learning (editors' note see Chris Cobb's paper to understand the reference) instead of all the different agencies and different national agendas. This was envisaged as a sort of über-agency for macro-level communication. There was a strong view that simply getting rid of some of the bodies is not the answer and that there has to be a standing forum for dialogue in the sense of 'talking things through', not just talking 'about' things.

It was widely recognised that we are in a dynamic situation with the development of e-learning and are exhibiting a classic example of policy needing to catch up with practice. In some cases strategies are getting in the way because things have changed so much since the strategy was published. The view was expressed that in many respects institutional strategies have to be conservative and not speculative: they have to express things that can be achieved, not necessarily what you want to do, and this can hold back development. Other delegates disagreed slightly and felt that strategy expressed at the right level is articulating the vision whereas the annual plan is the place for the achievable implementation steps.

Some participants went so far as to suggest that the root of the problem is the appointment of people who do not understand education to key roles as gatekeepers of knowledge. This group would wish to invert the strategy model and take the learner as the starting point. They expressed the view that 'Learning styles' is just a cult jargon phrase with little meaning in practice and that, realistically, learning is about moving to a place where you know a bit more than you did before. There are learning contexts where choosing the colour of your clothes is a significant activity and this has to be borne in mind when we talk about learning objectives and the meaning of level-ness up the educational tree. We must not lose sight of what learning is actually for.

Where institutions do have effective Learning and Teaching strategies there is still the question of how to turn them into effective e-strategies. Integration and blending with other forms of learning activity were seen as key. It was also noted that there is a need for objectives and targets to back up the strategy although there was considerable caution as to the appropriateness of blanket targets e.g. in subject areas. The potential importance of Virtual Research Environments (VREs) was noted although not explored in any detail.

The role of senior managers came in for much discussion. It was agreed by delegates from both sectors that there is a need for dedicated senior management posts to support lifelong learning. There was also concern from both sectors that

many of the most senior managers are not sufficiently well informed about current practice especially with regard to e-learning. This was seen as a particular problem in FE where many senior managers are now coming from backgrounds outside the education sector.

It was noted that the institutional agenda at senior management level is a very political one and can change very rapidly. Examples were given where a change in Vice-Chancellor/Principal resulted in changed priorities to the extent that some very promising developments had to be shelved. There was felt to be a very clear role for middle managers in better 'joining-up' the activities of senior managers and practitioners and in mediating between the two.

The situation is further complicated where collaborative arrangements are involved and it was seen as very important that collaborative groups must not be out of touch with institutional strategies. Partners need to know about existing strategies and plans for development at an early stage of any joint project and to keep up to date with the evolving picture. Many participants had experience of enthusiastic consortia tailing off as priorities and drivers changed. Similarly it was felt that expectations with regard to collaboration need to be written in to job descriptions and contracts rather than relying on the enthusiasm of individuals. Embedding cannot rely on individuals: 'You can't change a culture through enthusiasts'. It was also recognised that projects need resources for embedding, otherwise they are just 'enthusiasts tinkering at the edges'.

In particular it was recognised that Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between institutions are often signed at strategic level, then passed down the line for implementation with little or no guidance. However it was suggested that staff working in collaborative arrangements can take ownership of the MoU for themselves in terms of developing it and passing it up the chain for ratification. As one delegate said 'It is possible to drive a horse and cart through the arcane structures that were established in the 19th century and no longer apply'. Other delegates were more cautious about the 'Do It Yourself' approach to contractual agreements and felt that, whilst it was helpful for all staff to be involved in discussions about the principles of collaborative working, this is a legal minefield and legal advice must be sought. (Editors' note: the Union Education Online project hit problems with regard to Data Protection legislation – see Doug Gowan's paper. JISC has also published a study on the Legal Issues associated with Lifelong Learner Records [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_learner_records_legal_study &src=alpha](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_learner_records_legal_study&src=alpha)).

There was some concern that in many cases it is senior managers who are blocking innovation. Some delegates saw this as being all about the locus of control in the organisation and in education generally: 'the whole education system is about control'. Others saw it as more of a question of understanding and related it to the earlier point that senior managers may be out of touch with current practice. The view was expressed that senior managers can be 'heroic' about issues they understand, and take significant risks hence their caution in this area (e-learning and lifelong learning) is indicative of their lack of knowledge/understanding about the area.

It was noted that HNCs and foundation degrees are very different but there has been little or no time put aside to think about where collaboration is going between

Policy needs to catch up with practice

Will foundation degrees become unfashionable?

Projects need resources for embedding, otherwise they are just enthusiasts tinkering at the edges

the two. Some delegates were sceptical about fashions and whims and questioned whether foundation degrees will become unfashionable. There was believed to be a need to promote the benefits of foundation degrees to FE colleges and identify what is in it for them.

Suggestions for encouraging collaboration and innovation included HEIs offering small amounts of innovation funding that FE partners can bid for and having clearly identified staff time e.g. 2 hours off a week to innovate. It was felt that any such funding or incentives would need to be carefully channelled to ensure that the additional resource was used for backfilling rather than topping up general budgets. Another suggestion was funding students to undertake some research and development work.

Getting different types of organisation to work effectively together is challenging. Institutional size was seen to be a factor in that large institutions working with others can be slower to move. Small institutions on the other hand often have more resource issues but can move faster provided they aren't too set in their ways. Much depends on whether the people attending meetings are empowered to take decisions or simply refer them back to committees and this was felt to be as much about culture as size.

Culture and organisation are completely interbound and protectionist agendas are common within large institutions. Competition and lack of communication can lead in both colleges and universities to different parts of the institution competing with each other for the same students. The budget assigning process often creates this situation and this is very much an organisation issue since, at the end of the day, all of the income belongs to the organisation.



Drivers for Collaboration

Almost all of the groups questioned why we should want to collaborate. It was recognised that there are situations where the national agenda enforces collaboration and in these situations there can be differences in understanding the requirements of collaboration. The availability of time for collaboration is a challenge in both sectors but there are opportunities to 'buy' time through for example the HEFCE Innovation Fund.

As to the questions of 'What's in it for us?' and 'Who wins?' there do appear to be clear benefits for learners in foundation degrees especially where they are work based. They are getting people 'back on the ladder' and providing a feeder for Universities as people go on to do other things. Overlap is seen to help reduce the shock of moving from the FE world to the HE world and there is a perception that learners want seamless provision. Whether these reasons are good enough to make the investment was debated as was the question of whether foundation degrees were now putting FE and HE in direct competition with one another. In some cases the pressure for collaboration was due to the lack of physical space for course delivery and some delegates could see potential benefits in collaborating on IT and admin matters as well as teaching. Competition was also seen as a major driver allowing people to pool resources and hence have a bigger pot to play with.

The role of funding as a driver was examined and most people seemed to feel that collaboration would still occur without specific funding initiatives but the funding makes it easier. Examples were given of funding following once collaboration was established: bottom up initiatives with top down support.

It was seen as essential for all parties to understand why we want to join up and to identify common ground. This is inextricably linked to differentiation. Delegates also noted the need for vertical collaboration within institutions as well as horizontal collaboration across institutions.

One of the great myths about partnership working was seen to be the principle that it is 'a good thing' for all involved. In reality partnerships usually benefit the person and institution driving the partnership as they are able to reflect their own requirements when developing the bid. FE/HE partnerships face particular problems as it is difficult to get FE people to attend partnership consortium meetings and contribute to the process of developing the bid so there is no equal status between partners from the start. Status also depends on how people perceive themselves in their organisations and in the partnership but working with people closely, and developing an understanding of different contexts, helps to break down the prejudices and dispel the myths.

It was felt very strongly that real partnerships grow organically: they are not marriages of convenience. There is a substantial difference between being forced to collaborate and wanting to collaborate. Models of partnership that work are based on genuine reasons for working together. Bottom-up organic growth leads to sustainability. Good communications often depend on individual networks of contacts, knowing who is where, and movement of key contacts between organisations.

Delegates felt there should be incentives as well as requirements for staff to

Real
partnerships
grow
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they are not
marriages of
convenience

Difference
between
being forced
to collaborate
and wanting
to collaborate

Difference
between
collaboration
and sharing

e-learning will
always be a
bolt-on in
some
institutions

non-competitive
collaboration at
a regional level
or local level

if we don't
collaborate
we're not
flexible

Bottom-up
organic growth
leads to
sustainability

Collaboration is
weaving and
sharing process
and jumping off
and going your
own way at the
end of it

collaborate. In research-based institutions the main incentive is the RAE and the carrot to encourage staff to collaborate is time. There was almost universal agreement from those represented at the Think Tank that parity of esteem between teaching excellence and research excellence in HE is an essential requirement but there was an equally strong feeling that this is unlikely ever to happen. As one delegate put it 'We need to accept that e-learning will always be a bolt-on in some institutions because learning was always a bolt-on to research'.

There was a feeling that, despite government pressure to collaborate, some of the legal issues related to cross-institutional working appear currently insoluble particularly with regard to Data Protection. There is also considerable anecdotal evidence about the failure of institutions to enter into properly defined consortium agreements with regard to issues such as copyright and IPR. It was suggested that the amount of time needed to spend talking about all these common factors is generally vastly underestimated and there was a concern that things have moved on by the time you arrive at commonality.

It was felt that technology can and should be used to break down barriers but all too often it becomes a barrier in itself. If systems don't work together there is instant frustration and blame. It was however noted that technical and legal arguments are often used as deliberate barriers by people protecting their own area.

The difference between collaboration and sharing was explored. The development of e-learning materials in a collaborative way would be much cheaper and some examples e.g. in nursing were cited. In this case a package on drugs has been produced by a small group and the product is being sold to others so that profits can be used to re-invest. There was a feeling that institutions need to pick carefully what they are going to collaborate on as some Reusable Learning Objects can be so generic they're meaningless although some delegates questioned why different institutions should provide different materials.

It was suggested that collaboration could be encouraged by government agencies actually funding the creation of collaborative bids. This would involve some kind of two stage bidding process with institutions being rewarded for the cost of creating and bids that get to the second stage.

Collaboration was seen very much as a process not an end point. There is often resistance to collaboration for its own sake but there can be real benefits gained from the journey: -'collaboration is weaving and sharing a process and jumping off and going your own way at the end of it'.

Bridging FE/HE

There was much discussion around the area of cultural differences across the sectors. Although recognising that communication can be a problem within institutions as well as between institutions it does appear that communication between the FE and HE sectors is dogged by popular myths and misconceptions. Examples include: 'academics do not understand SMEs'; 'HE is just interested in research'; 'HE takes long holidays and does hardly any teaching'. It was agreed we need to understand and appreciate the differences between FE and HE and honour those differences rather than attempting homogeneity.

There was some debate about the true extent of the different working conditions between FE and HE. Some people felt that HE contact hours and workloads, particularly in new HEIs are just as onerous as FE but it was generally recognised that the nature of staff contracts and working habits does differ between FE and HE. One institution experienced difficulties setting up its foundation degrees as the HEI set aside time for course development during the summer when FE staff were unavailable and consequently the partnership required revision of FE contracts. The number of part time staff in FE also raises issues not least around staff development but also around IT support for evening provision.

Staff turnover appears to be higher in FE and there are particular issues due to colleges not knowing who will be teaching a course until just before it starts. This is also an issue for staff development as often changes mean training has been directed at the wrong staff.

It was noted that the idea of quality is different between subjects and sectors but quality frameworks appears to be an area where differences between the sectors is particularly marked. The focus of the FE mechanisms is on inspection which represents a major difference from the HE approach to quality. One delegate noted 'Sharing resources in different courses and institutions is great, but HE institutions persist in maintaining their individual quality and accreditation systems which just perpetuates duplication of effort in different ways'. It was suggested that QAA and Ofsted should be better aligned and that this could be achieved without any radical restructuring of the two bodies.

HE takes long holidays and does hardly any teaching

Nobody works in summer in FE

I don't think HE understands FE learners

FE focus is on inspection not quality



We're not even talking the same language

There's no reason not to bring the funding together

Getting rid of the labels might be useful

Universities don't think they can learn from colleges

FE is very innovative in terms of classroom teaching

Ownership of collaborative initiatives is an issue. People need to perceive benefits to them rather than feel it is something being done to them. There is particular resentment if something is seen as initiated from the 'other' sector. There seems to be a tradition of HE being the lead partner in collaborative ventures and a clear indication that FE feels unequal as a partner which affects how colleges buy in. Where FE is perceived as the junior partner in collaboration, the HEI often assumes a monitoring role which is not necessarily the same as sitting down and collaborating.

It was noted that many external systems e.g. the JISC bidding process are inherently weighted against FE. The deadlines are too short and the language is HE language. Common vocabularies and understanding are difficult to achieve even within institutions let alone across sector boundaries and opportunities to bring together FE/HE to explore this e.g. at events such as this are few. A lack of commonality of roles within the sectors makes it difficult to know who to pull together.

Greater use of shared resources was a popular idea with most delegates as was the idea that HE could make some of its resources, such as libraries, available to staff in partner colleges. This was seen as a major benefit to FE staff yet at little cost to the HEI. However in one area where this has been tried there was little take-up from college tutors. It was also noted that in terms of shared use of IT systems licensing across FE/HE is a bugbear.

The idea that universities don't think they can learn from colleges was believed to be changing, at least on the teaching side, as FE is very innovative in terms of classroom teaching. The use of e-resources in FE is almost entirely classroom based whereas universities use is almost exclusively not. The two approaches meet in foundation degrees and both have much to learn from the other side. Recognition for e-learning in FE is problematic as FE funding is based on taught hours whereas HE gets its funds for student numbers. As one delegate put it 'FE doesn't do e-learning as it doesn't know how to get funding for it'. In universities staff are also deployed for teaching hours but HE is starting to look at concepts such as 'learning hours facilitated'. This expands the traditional view of teaching and can encompass a range of learning activities including use of online communication and collaboration tools.

Delegates were keen to see more dialogue between the sectors and greater understanding of each others values. Better communications are needed amongst both teaching and support staff particularly IT support and we should seek to develop networking opportunities. It was felt that FE staff should get into universities to showcase what they are doing and university staff should visit colleges. Both FE and HE have a range of diverse offerings and as one delegate put it 'If you haven't got experience of both then how can you make sense of the cultural differences?' For instance it was suggested that universities don't necessarily understand Access programmes and there was a feeling from the HE delegates that they needed to do more to understand the profile of FE students. Ultimately greater staff mobility between FE and HE institutions is needed and it was suggested that formal exchange programmes could facilitate this. Another suggestion was the setting up of subject or function based cross-sector online communities of practice. There was a strong view that there is a need for formal networks as we can't just rely on informal contact. We need to set up 'rules' to

enable effective networking to take place. It was suggested that the JISC Regional Support Centres (RSCs) can provide a bridge although concern was expressed that RSC links to HE are not strong enough even though most are sited in Universities.

There appeared to be widespread support for the idea of putting funding on a more level playing field by having a single funding body for FE and HE in all of the UK nations rather than only in Scotland as at present.

Concept of
'learning hours
facilitated'
rather than
teaching

FE feels
unequal as a
partner

Staff
development
is a dirty word
in FE

Why didn't we
get this barrier
when moved
from OHP to
Powerpoint?

The initiative
of the day goes
to the top of
the pile

Staff Development

Staff development came up in all of the groups as a major factor in the success of collaborative initiatives and the need for an institution-wide staff development strategy was recognised. Moreover it was noted that staff development must be planned on a sustainable rather than a one-off basis. Again there appear to be differences in the approaches of FE and HE and it was noted that the principle of taking time off for staff development was established long ago in the schools sector, but not in FE. Tutors in FE are now required to take a teaching and learning qualification but the ILT agenda seems to have slipped and there is much less emphasis now on ILT Champions. As one delegate put it 'the flavour of the initiative of the day goes to the top of the pile'.

There was a perception that staff development is something of a dirty word in FE. Staff development means things management want you to know about not things that help your teaching. Most FE colleges build 4-5 training days into the year but staff have little choice over what topics they study and much of the training is related to Health and Safety etc. Staff support was seen as a more positive way of presenting development activity: 'Staff development gives me more work to do – staff support helps me'. There was a feeling that staff development should be embedded into practice in such a way that people can see they're getting real help.

ICT skills were discussed and it was suggested that there should be a staff development requirement for everyone to do an online course and that pay and appraisal systems could reflect this. It was also felt that a minimum level of IT skill should be a requirement on recruitment to avoid the situation whereby 'Dinosaur institutions attract dinosaur staff'. In a recent survey in one university Heads of School were asked if a lack of IT skills was a barrier to e-learning. This group said 'Yes' but teaching staff said 'No'. UCISA has identified a barrier in that staff tend to think their IT skills are better than they are. There appear to be gender differences in self-evaluation of IT skill amongst students with male students over estimating their own skills and female students underestimating. It was noted that IT staff development needs to be 'just in time' and that IT shouldn't be introduced before proper support is in place.

It was felt that accreditation frameworks linked to HE Academy and ALT professional frameworks would help raise the profile of e-learning as a staff development priority although accreditation of professional qualifications inevitably adds to the time commitment. The example was given of one FE college where staff are supported to do 2 hours a week on a voluntary basis to do one module of a PGCE on using e-learning to support existing teaching and can do the module without going for accreditation.

Staff development for part time staff is a particular issue as the staff are generally only paid for teaching. The example was given of one university where part time teaching staff working over 6 hours per week are allowed time for staff development and are required to do a PGCE.

Staff development in a cross-organisational context poses particular issues especially with regard to training in ICT as the partner institutions may be using different VLEs and admin systems. There is a clear need for protected time to share staff development. However experience seems to suggest that staff development is almost always overlooked or delivered too late or in the wrong place. Exchange visits, shadowing and use of existing consortia (e.g. library staff)

were all suggested as ways forward. The example was given of one university that opens up its staff development courses to FE partners. The university staff also go out to FE colleges rather than expecting everyone to come to them. There was enthusiasm for getting staff developers in FE and HE talking to each other.

It was suggested that collaboration at local level could benefit from some sort of forum for bringing staff together in an online context and that this could be a compulsory part of induction to the process of collaborative working. It was however felt that to get technology adopted, you have to remove other ways of doing things.

There was some criticism of the JISC for putting too much emphasis on the development of tools and not funding staff development. It was explained that the JISC's remit expressly excludes it funding staff development programmes although it does fund staff development within its programmes. There was a feeling that JISC should be targeting staff developers as well as ILT Champions with the information it puts out as it is recognised that there is a difference between people who organise e-learning training (ILT Champions) and people responsible for staff development.

Bad teachers
use VLEs to
avoid teaching

Staff
development
gives me more
work to do –
staff support
helps me

the ILT agenda
seems to have
slipped

'e' is a delivery mechanism

Pedagogy as a term has been hijacked

Blended learning: 'Victorian' teaching with electronic approaches

Technology has evolved but has the thinking?

It's like a mobile phone deal you opt out of one scheme for a better one

Approaches to e-Learning

All of the groups spent some time discussing what is meant by e-learning and yet again there appeared to be differences in the definition between FE and HE. One group suggested the following definition of e-learning 'learning achieved through utilisation of electronic information and communication using tools that are freely available and easily accessible both technically and, preferably, financially'. Another recognised that e-learning is a 'broad portfolio of approaches'. The comment was made that post-its could come under the umbrella of ILT as they are other than pen and paper – thus a whole spectrum of non technical tools can be included in addition to utilisation of whiteboards, PDAs, etc to assist learning.

The lack of a common understanding was felt to be an issue since the DfES definition is very broad: different individuals have different understandings and that can affect where money goes. After much discussion the comment was made that, 'if this group can't come up with a common understanding then nationally it could be a real problem!' There was a general acceptance that it should perhaps be more about the shared experience rather than the language used.

Comment was also made that there was a prevalence of made up words and too much jargon in this field. The practice of adding an 'e' on the front of anything was criticised and it was agreed that 'e' is a delivery mechanism. There was some enthusiasm for dropping the 'e' in the very near future and recognising that learning is learning regardless of the tools used to support it. As one delegate put it 'Pedagogy as a term has been hijacked – it's not really appropriate – it should be about learning not teaching'.

It was identified that the delivery of e-learning can be quite patchy and amongst the groups institutions were in different phases of evolution. It was suggested that whereas e-learning should only be limited by imagination and creativity the increasing approach is blended learning or 'Victorian' teaching with electronic approaches. It was noted that some institutions claim courses are online when in fact it's just that some reading lists or other information have been put up – it's not teaching content that's online. In practice e-learning is often about storing content rather than being interactive. Interactivity was, it was suggested, too expensive. The point was made that learning should be about something other than exposure to content; it's about engagement with content and acquisition of skills. As one participant said 'Technology has evolved but has the thinking?'

A question was raised about how effectively we can deliver practical skills via e-learning? The responses to this question were very positive and indicated that it can be done and is being done. Examples included courses on painting and decorating, golf caddying, fish gutting, archaeological excavation, nursing and music.

It was felt that there needs to be more of an incentive for academics to engage in e-learning activities and the lack of parity in terms of rewards for research as opposed to good teaching was noted as a major inhibiting factor.

An issue raised by a number of groups was the fact that we may be inclined to over-estimate the level of IT skill amongst school leavers. 'Just because they use mobile phones doesn't mean they understand technology.' It was noted that the introduction of graphic user interfaces means that many young people know less

about file structures and what goes on behind the scenes than IT users did 20 years ago. This can be a barrier to e-learning and it was noted that some commercial VLEs require a high level of understanding of file structures etc for effective use. In collaborative arrangements there can be issues for the learner relating to the compatibility of environments since having to use different VLEs in colleges and universities can be 'clunky' and disruptive.

It was felt that we are only just starting to consider the impact of e-learning and cross-institutional learning on the design of learning spaces. For the cross-institutional learner where does learning take place and using whose resources?

It was also noted that learners are starting to see themselves more as consumers and e-learning offers them the possibility of studying at institutions well away from their home area. It was believed that this will result in the increased 'marketisation' of learning. As one delegate put it 'It's like a mobile phone deal you opt out of one scheme for a better one'. There was some disagreement about the extent to which this would put FE and HE in competition with one another with some delegates asserting that collaboration is still a good thing because the FE and HE markets are quite different and by collaborating both sectors can tap new markets. It was however recognised that we need to understand more about learner expectations. The example was given of an e-learning course that was sold to learners on the basis of it being flexible. By flexible the institution meant that there was 24 x 7 access to the resources so learners could study when they chose to. However the drop-out rate for this particular course was very high with learners saying it wasn't sufficiently flexible by which they meant they wanted more choice in terms of which parts of the course they studied.

It's
marketisation of
learning

e-learning is
past now isn't
it? It's just
learning now

If you
appreciate
learner
expectations
then you've
cracked it

Just because
they use mobile
phones doesn't
mean they
understand
technology



Perspectives





About the Speaker

Chris Cobb is a Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Roehampton University. He was formerly the Director of Business Systems and Services at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and was responsible for the LSE's Management Information Systems, Website and a number of the School's core support services including its teaching infrastructure. Currently Chair of the UCISA Corporate Information Systems Group, Chris sits on the Universities UK, SCOP & DfES Information Management Taskforce and the DfES HE Institutions Consultative Group. In these roles he has become a key liaison point for the consultation on the proposed Unique Learner Number as well as the development of the IMS LIP standard for the exchange of student information and the Shibboleth protocol for authentication and authorisation to restricted resources.

Chris Cobb

Orwell or All's Well?

A Corporate Systems Perspective on Connecting Up Learner Information

Another pessimistic title? You'll have to look out for the 1984 references! Before I get going I thought I'd just ask for a show of hands on how many institutions think they've completed their MLE so far? As I suspected no hands. The MLE Landscape Survey last year identified quite a lot of activity in percentage terms but relatively few institutions in the advanced stages of MLE implementation. My point is that if it's hard to articulate a joined-up data environment within our own institutions and actually implement it, then how are we going to do it between institutional or even sector boundaries?

The new register of Learning Providers published on January 1st 2005 has over 5,000 entries including a café, a prison and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Getting all these providers to talk to one another and exchange learning information is a huge challenge and one which is dwarfed in the context of Bologna IMS standards which could cover learning throughout Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. We have a mountain to climb and we're not even in the foothills. Last year I became involved in an initiative known as the 'Unique Learner Number'. It's an innocuous sounding project - more of a data attribute than a project - at least that's what I thought until I started digging into the detail. As always the devil is in the detail.

ULN, as it became known, originated from the DfES (or should that be the Ministry of Love) motivated by a desire to join up government as well as improve the learner experience. The DfES wanted to improve the longitudinal view of learning activity in the UK. As it stands it's not easy to track someone's educational route through the system. Pupil numbers are allocated by the QCA for GCSEs, A Levels, NVQs and GNVQs; the Learning & Skills Council allocate their own number for every student on Work-based Learning and Learn Direct; and in HE Undergraduates and Postgraduates are allocated HESA IDs (which were originally intended to be lifelong numbers but as it transpires most institutions allocate new numbers to students on arrival). The DfES had seen how the NHS number had managed to link patient records together in the health service and they felt that a new universal learner number would work the same for education. At the very least a common number would provide a lingua franca between institutions, funding bodies, student support agencies, LEAs and learners themselves.

As I came to understand it more the number was just the start of it. The proposal was pitched at four levels of implementation: level four would see the ULN ultimately become the primary key to a database administered by a new quango called the Learner Benefits Agency. This would see learning providers maintain

learner information on one centralised system. Learners with authorised access to that data could release it to employers when applying for work, to new institutions when applying for entry and to the SLC when applying for financial support. At the macro level socio-economists from the Treasury would be able to track the returns on investment from the government purse. Faster decisions, more efficient processes, a Win/Win situation (apart from for the tax payer) or was it?

Effectively, level four implementation proposed one large student record system covering birth-to-death learning across the whole of the UK. Some of you will recall that in the early 90's HEFCE proposed that universities should collaborate on the development of a common student record system the so-called 'MAC Initiative'. In the end four families of universities formed though the institutions found it hard to agree on data attributes, functionality and interfaces. By the time the system became operational, technology had moved on and most institutions went out and bought supplier solutions.

Why couldn't the institutions agree? Why can't we subscribe to one system? Surely one student is much the same as another? The reasons are the same as those that gave rise to my first job at LSE in the late 80's. The major colleges of the University of London, UCL, Queen Mary, Kings, Imperial and so on, had all had enough of the inflexibility of one centralised University of London system. The colleges felt that Senate House was unresponsive to the other colleges and the central systems were inflexible to their specific requirements. The matter at the time was that colleges needed the freedom of self determination to develop systems that were geared towards their individual education, business and research needs.

In the UCISA response to the ULN proposals I posed some questions to the Ministry of Love. Who were the main beneficiaries of the centralised system? Learners may gain from faster decisions on financial support or academic admissions however previous qualifications comprise only part of the decision making process - financial references and target ratios all have a bearing and it's dubious whether the proposal would have had an effect on the speed of the process as a whole. I suggested that rather than improve access, a mandatory learner record may become a barrier to those that have not come up through the standard UK education route, in particular lifelong learners and learners from overseas. Given that the latter is a growing and lucrative market, the ULN would make UK plc less competitive.

I also raised concerns over data protection and individual liberty. Some learners may choose to have aspects of the learner record expunged either temporarily or permanently for quite legitimate reasons for example the sensitivity of the academic subject or simply the number of retakes. The learner should always have a choice over who sees what but is there a conflict of interest with other agendas? For example the Student Loans Company needing to know all previous learning in order to determine entitlement to benefits.

Then I questioned why specifically a learner number? The arguments for and against a unique learner number are the same as those for the unique citizen number. Many students already have Learning and Skills Council numbers, NHS nursing numbers, teacher registration numbers: why have another number? A multitude of unique numbers for different purposes is complicated and costly. I suggested that it may be prudent to await the introduction of one consolidated

multifunctional citizen number from the Ministry of Truth. I suggested that in the meantime we should re-use and purpose what we already have for example link together existing numbers, pupil numbers, HESA numbers and so on. The original DfES proposals did not detail the reasons behind discounting use of existing data sets and agencies. They merely said that no agency or data set currently had a broad enough scope but this is not enough reason to create a new quango with all that that entails. Enhancing, partnering and linking existing agencies and resources together may be more difficult to articulate but ultimately more feasible to achieve.

Finally, being a UCISA response, I had to question why they are not combining the initiative with academic purpose? All UK HE students are entitled to an Athens username and password maintained by Eduserve. Many FE colleges, primary care trusts and some schools are also Athens subscribers. Furthermore, the new Shibboleth protocol that allows for federated authentication and authorisation without the need for one centralised database offers a more stable solution and recognises that there will be an ever growing number of learners and learning providers. The federated model also acknowledges that the learning environment is dynamic. Today we have the social inclusion agenda, tomorrow we will see the effects of the free market, the outcome of the Foster review of FE and the implementation of Tomlinson (or not as the case may be). Over the next five years we will see the unitisation of all non HE learning outcomes from the QCA framework for achievement. Who knows what else is around the corner? Whatever solution we end up with will need to be adaptable. Aligning administrative learning identity towards authentication and learning resources would guarantee take up and use whilst at the same time enhancing the learning experience.

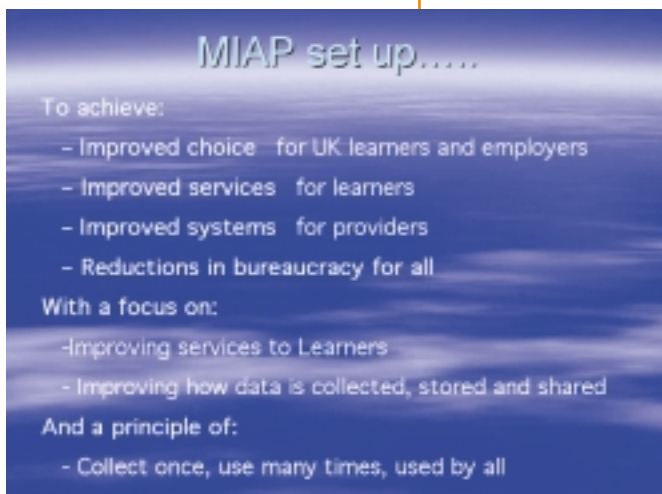
I'm glad to say these views and those of others were listened to and the Ministry of Truth spoke to the Ministry of Love and the news came through that the Information Commissioner would after all (following initial resistance) allow the DfES to use the National Insurance Number as the key to the records – a major breakthrough that brings us up to date.

The ULN project became known as the MIAP project - an altogether more pronounceable acronym. MIAP stands for Managing of Information Across Partners and it does exactly what it says on the tin.

The MIAP approach is a far more pragmatic approach than the original proposals. It recognises that there's a lot of data that already exists and learning providers

cannot, and should not, be forced into using one centralised system. However it also recognises that over time their systems could exchange information between one another more flexibly. MIAP is also all-embracing: these are the partners:

- AoC
- Association of Learning Providers
- Becta
- Bureaucracy Review Group
- Cabinet Office e-Government Unit
- Connexions



MIAP set up.....

To achieve:

- Improved choice for UK learners and employers
- Improved services for learners
- Improved systems for providers
- Reductions in bureaucracy for all

With a focus on:

- Improving services to Learners
- Improving how data is collected, stored and shared

And a principle of:

- Collect once, use many times, used by all

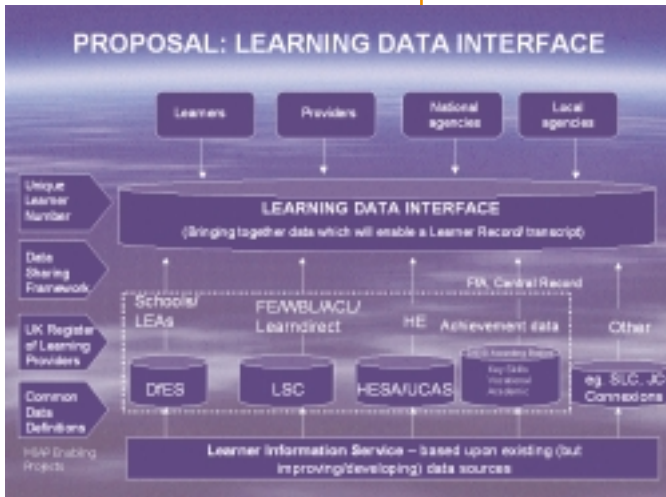
- Department for Employment and Learning
- Department for Work and Pensions
- DfES
- ELWA
- Federation of Awarding Bodies
- HEFCE
- HEFCW
- HESA
- HOLEX
- JISC
- Job Centre Plus
- Learning and Skills Council
- Learning and Skills Development Agency
- Local Government Association
- NIACE
- Ofsted
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Quality Assurance Agency
- SCOP
- Scottish Executive
- Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- SHA
- Skills for Business
- Small Business Service
- Student Loans Company Ltd
- Teacher Training Agency
- Ufl Learn Direct
- Universities UK

There are a lot of them but can you see any learners listed? I still think there's a danger that the outcomes are being supplier driven. I also have concerns that the partnership proposals are all still about administrative expediency and nothing to do with the learning process: access to restricted-licence learning resources for example. Despite the MIAP principles that I've just listed, are the learners' needs being put before all others? Would learner registration become a barrier to the

walk-in learner, a mature student or an immigrant? These are exactly the types of student that the widening participation agenda is targeting. What would the ever-growing number of overseas students make of it? Would they need an NI number in order to study here? If they ended up getting a work visa which NI number would they use for the learner record?

Anyway, what does MIAP propose? This diagram outlines the current MIAP thinking.

The structure is based around the reuse of existing data sets, linking them together through a newly developed learning data information base. The cylindrical silos represent the data - it is envisaged that these silos will remain but access to the data will be opened up to other agencies and organisations to use. The learning data interface is likely to be a browser-based portal within an xml-based web service drawing information held from each of the silos. A company called Oakleigh Consulting is carrying out a feasibility study on what this interface might look like and what technology might be used for it. The feasibility study is based upon the two DfES data sets. Oakleigh will outline the outcomes of the feasibility



study in a set of workshops in March 2005.

Although ministers are keen in principle and subject to an election, (and possible change of government), it does seem likely that it's all systems go. This structure is effectively a building block – a framework rather than an end-point. It will require the definition of exchange standards and protocols and the DfES estimates that it will take 4 to 5 years to build. In principle I think the revised framework is a pragmatic approach. It will help the SLC to see what study has already been undertaken; it will help learners assess their entitlement to financial support; it may also help the learner in mapping out their personal development portfolio and keeping a record of achievement against those objectives. I do have reservations: I'm not at all sure this structure will help in the application process. We're not in a Schwartz world yet and nor are we likely to be. Offers are still being made on the basis of predicted grades. A network set of systems will not guarantee that the information will be there in a timely way immediately following the qualification. Future institutions and employers will still have to request certificates and proof

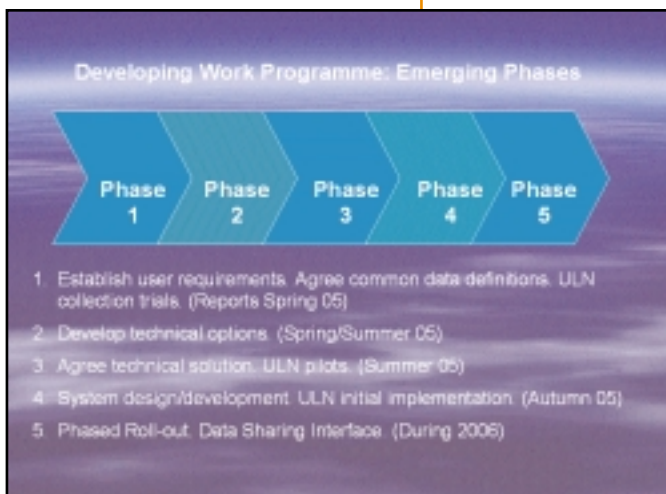
from the learner. Also the HESA record is only updated annually and in any case it is a statistical snapshot and can be subject to change and is therefore unreliable as a reference point for qualifications. Ultimately each institution will need to provide a web service to the server interface. Will learners and learning providers actually use it? Will it be an expensive white elephant? I keep on returning to its administrative focus rather than its academic objective.

And finally this slide shows the implementation phases

To answer the original question 'Orwell or all's well?'

Sceptical as I am Winston Smith should not be alarmed.

Although learning requires thinking and thought I do not see that the MIAP facilitates thought so overall I think it's more all's well than Orwell.



References

MLE Landscape Survey links - <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/Resources/external-resources/landscape-study/view> http://www.jisc.ac.uk/project_mle_activity.html

MIAP links -

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/learning&skills/docs/MIAP%20Data%20Sharing%20Framework%20FINAL.doc>

Schwartz links - <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/>



About the Speaker

Doug Gowan is Chief Executive of the Open Learning Partnership (OLP). OLP is an educational charity specialising in online learning, learning centre development, and capacity building for community learning. OLP has built a reputation for innovative, practical solutions in open learning. Doug was previously Director of Studies for the TUC Education Service, and Campaigns Director for Public Service Union PCS.

Doug Gowan

Delivering Union Education Online

I'm going to talk about a project which is right in the middle of all the things that Chris was talking about. It's basically a reality check about how those problems are real ones, how we tackle them and what other problems there are. The project is called Union Education Online and it is one of the JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning projects. I'm the Chief Executive of a charity called the Open Learning Partnership. It's a small educational charity, consisting of five people, which was set up in the wake of the 'education, education, education' election in 1997. We didn't know what Tony was going to talk about at that point (until we realised it was about the number of Education Secretaries that get through the first year). We were full of enthusiasm for lifelong learning and that's what we are - a lifelong learning charity. We also work across sectors - we work largely in FE but also in Adult and Community Learning and HE so we do cover a range of things that make up lifelong learning. Some of our most successful projects are covering this across the sectors for example a teacher training project which takes people working in community centres and gives them a higher education qualification supported through FE colleges.

The Union Education Online project is a multinational project. By multinational we mean it covers the four home countries (as we now have to call them). As we will see, that is not necessarily an easy job. The issue about different education systems in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England is making a lot of the things Chris talked about substantially more difficult. The project is also an ambitious one: it is part of a wider strategy that's being developed by the Trade Union Congress (TUC). The strategy states that within a certain timeframe all the education that the TUC offers for its union representatives and union officers will be available online. The reason for this is to overcome some real problems about access especially to important courses that union officials need to participate in.

As an example, last year there was an important piece of legislation about lifelong learning. Probably not a lot of people know about the creation of a new type of officer called the Union Learning Representative. The Union Learning Representative is a bit like a Safety Representative - they have certain rights to talk to employers about lifelong learning in the workplace. One example of a learner we have on an online course at the moment is a single parent with four children. She is the Union Learning Representative in a Tesco supermarket and when we looked at her records she was logging on at 5 in the morning. We asked her why this was and she said that is the only time she can get onto her computer because her four

boys use it for the rest of the day. Her only opportunity for learning is between 5 and 7 in the morning.

The project is FE based and we have partners in the four countries specifically to test some of the problems and issues that emerge by having different educational systems. We faced four main challenges:

- Divergence in four country educational systems
- Limited technical experience
- Short timescale
- Highly ambitious scope

Diverging education systems was a major issue. There's no two ways about it, in terms of funding, in terms of quality assurance and in terms of qualifications, the systems are diverging. As part of our project we had to construct a new data set rather like the new data sets that are required for the MIAP system. We had to do that because we're hoping to recruit people on to courses supported by FE colleges in the four countries and the data sets are different. They are slightly different which is rather annoying, if they were very different it would be easier, but they are slightly different.

Another major challenge we've got is technical expertise. We don't have people who do these nice diagrams, we don't have a lawyer who deals with data protection, we don't have developers and programmers, we have to find those people and bring them into this project. Our job is to run the project rather than be experts.

There was a short time scale for this project (it actually runs out in a few weeks time) and it has to set up a system whereby those courses will work across the four countries and real learners will do real things on them. It is also an ambitious project. We are trying to construct something completely new across the whole country. It will not look to participants like a pilot. For them it's real; it's a real course that they will get something out of.

Data protection is a big issue that is really causing problems with records. When you've got multiple partners each requiring some view of the data you've got to have very firm agreements between all of these partners about which bits of data they can see, alter, control and process. It is an administrative problem that the legislation, not only on data protection but also on freedom of information, has made all of this discussion a lot more difficult. We discovered as we got into the project that there is another set of people who need to look at the data: the external moderators. These are people from the awarding bodies who moderate courses and therefore need to look at the data about learners. It never struck us till we started doing the project that there would be so many data issues involved.

Because we've got partners all over the UK we had to think hard about how we run this project. It had to be very business like. The project implementation document is regularly updated. That might seem obvious but my experience of projects is that very often you write your project bid and then three weeks before the end of the project you get it out again. It wouldn't have worked if we'd taken that approach with this project because all the things we were discovering by doing it wouldn't have been reflected or written back into the project plan.

We had short frequent phone conferences. It's old technology but it has been successful. With people all over the UK you can get a lot more done with a regular 40 minute or one hour phone conference than perhaps having a day's meeting once every three months. We actually have three weekly phone conferences which are kept to one hour. One of the most damaging things for projects is to have a culture of meetings that ramble on that don't get things done - it destroys confidence.

We took a problem solving approach and relied on very short time-limited working groups to carry out specific tasks to solve problems such as those relating to data protection and issues with the data set. The message is focus on problem solving and not problem documentation.

The next thing is to make sure all stakeholders are actively involved. I mentioned the external moderators - that could have been something that went wrong. What we did was invite them to join the project and give input to make sure that the bit that we didn't know about at the beginning was a success and not another problem.

Those are the main lessons from the project. I think the project is working in its own kind of way and the lessons that I draw from it are about project development and management and about being business like and having short meetings and

clear documentation. Linking the project to a wider strategy is also important. I think one of the reasons why we have got the commitment of partners is that the project is very clearly part of a wider aim to develop this online learning strategy for the TUC. It has a clear point to it which is to open up lifelong learning for everybody and that's the reason we have the backing for it.

The other lesson is to use real learners on real courses. The project has not been set up to construct a system in the abstract. We are setting up some real courses that have to run and therefore the problems have to be fixed by a certain date.

Finally, after Big Brother, a message from Chairman Mao. The obvious one is when being asked by a European Journalist if he

believed that the French Revolution had been a success he replied 'It's too early to tell' but I actually prefer the one where he said 'You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything.'



References

JISC MLE4LL Programme – Link to Phase 2 of MLEs for Lifelong Learning -

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_mle_lifelong2

Building MLEs across HE and FE -

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_buildmle_hefe

The Open Learning Partnership <http://www.olp.org.uk>

Editors' note:

If you're interested in the issues Doug raises you may want to look at the coverage of similar issues in our infoKits on:

Project Management and Records Management at:

<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/InfoKits>



About the Speaker

Bob Sharpe is the Director of Information and Learning Services (ILS) at the University of Plymouth. ILS provides computing, library and media services to the University. He is a member of the JISC Integrated Information Environment Committee and is Project Director for the JISC funded SHELL project. Bob is also a member of the South West Museums Libraries and Archives Council (SWMLAC) board and chairs the SWMLAC ICT Steering Group. He chairs the Steering Group for the JISC-funded South West Regional Support Centre (RSC) which is hosted by the University of Plymouth and is also a member of the SWRDA ICT Strategy Group.

Bob Sharpe

Overcoming the Cultural Challenges

The SHELL (South West Hosts Enhancing Lifelong Learning) project has been running for the last three years and we've thoroughly enjoyed doing it although it's been a little challenging at times. What I want to do is to:

- outline what SHELL is to give you some context
- look at the cultural challenges and issues that we have faced
- look at how we got round those

Finally I'll say how much we think we've achieved. Although we've been billed as being successful we haven't achieved everything we set out to do.

SHELL was funded within the JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme and the programme was about exploring issues relating to developing learning environments. One of the first issues we came across was the issue Chris discussed about needing a unique learner number to do what we were trying to do. We also dealt with the data protection issues that Doug talked about.

Key elements of the JISC programme are that it was about integrating technologies, systems to support lifelong learning and promoting student ability. The shift from function-centred to learner-centred systems is an area we were very much trying to work in. We wanted to provide something that would support the learner in moving from institution to institution so they could take their lifelong learning record with them. As part of that we had to re-examine business processes and this is where we got into some of the cultural challenges and got the further education colleges and HEIs to develop and test improved processes for doing things. And of course one always looks at demonstrable benefits to the learner at the end of the day. We were keen to do that and part of the project was to provide students with full PDPs via a portal written in xml, so they could move around the learner record from institution to institution.

That was the theory anyway. These are the institutions involved at the original launch of the project:

Core	Full – above plus
Cornwall College	Bicton College of Agriculture
Exeter College	City of Bristol College
North Devon College	East Devon College
Somerset College of Arts & Technology	Highlands College
University of Plymouth	Penwith College
	Plymouth College of Art and Design
	Plymouth College of FE
	South Devon College
	Truro College
	Weymouth College

The consortium itself was an existing consortium and we thought 'If you take an existing consortium lots of things are going to work and a lot of issues will be resolved and the consortium will work well together won't it? Life will be easy'. It was quite a big consortium with a core group of five institutions who did the development work. The idea was to do that in the first year then the five would get it up and running in the second year and in the third year we'd roll it out to the other ten institutions. We didn't quite make that final bit: we did roll it out to one or two additional sites but quite a few of those institutions in the original list dropped out by the end of the project as they had other things to do at that time. This did enable us to bring in a couple of schools which added quite an interesting dimension.

The objective was to achieve single registration for all partnership students. The university has 4,500 students out doing, mainly first year, courses in FE institutions. That's nearly our largest faculty, it's really quite a substantial part (one seventh) of our business. The students were registering at their local FE college and they were filling in a university registration form and then that registration form was going into an envelope and sitting on a desk for a while and eventually it would find its way over to the university just in time for early December for the returns to the funding council. That was a bit of a problem for lots of reasons and I'll come on to those as we go through.

We were trying to achieve rapid efficient transfer of data between consortium members so that students were co-registered. They would register at one institution and that would feed the data through and they'd be registered at the university. This is the key to providing timely access to VLE materials. The question was asked earlier 'Have we developed a full MLE?' The answer to that is 'No we haven't.' We do have a VLE and 66% of our modules are delivered via the VLE, a very large take up, very popular with the students. We're also delivering those modules out in the 15 FE colleges to as well so students can get university information whilst they are out in the partner institutions. Of course to do that they need to have their user ID and password and to do that they need to be registered so if the registration forms are taking 2 months to get from the college into the university system it's a bit of a problem.

Transfer of results is also a bit of an issue and it sort of happens in round about ways. We hope to provide a web portal, as I've mentioned, for students to get at

their formal record and eventually their PDP elements (the personal side of that) and also give staff access to a view of their students but their students only.

The partnership thus looked a bit like this at the start:

Transfer of Registration Data

The yellow blobs are the partner colleges. We built a hub with a learner record database on which all the partners would put their registration details from their student record systems. This is where the xml and the standards come in. That's fine in terms of building a learner record for all the FE students and all the HE students. It's all straightforward and all the partners have view of the details except that actually the university never quite got round to putting its data in. What the university actually wanted was the data from the partner colleges into the hub and then into its student record system so it had got its students registered nice and cleanly and crisply. We had two slightly different agendas here which is quite a good way to get into cultural problems and

differences. The idea was then we'd go on and add all the other partners and then link that across to other regions. This is a bottom up approach rather than Chris's top down approach with MIAP.

Regional ioNode Infrastructure/Longer Term Vision

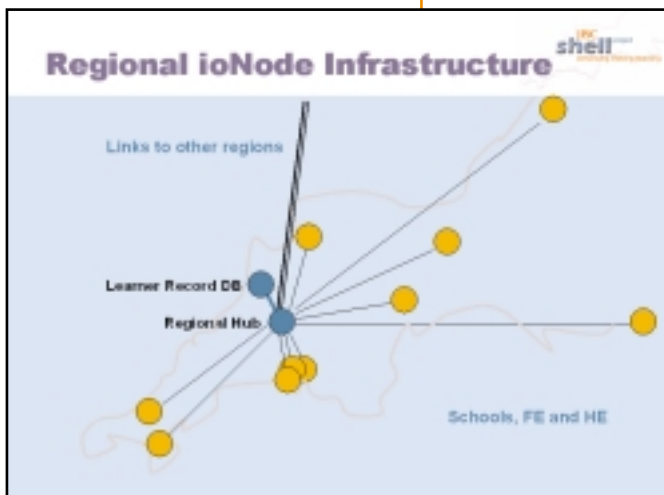
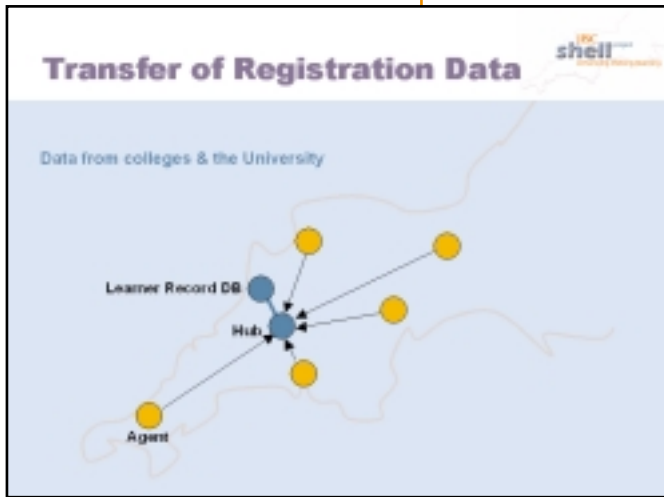
The concept for the future looks a little like the above with regions stitched together. Schools and exam boards put their data in here. It's all IMS enterprise and LIP in standards terms so everyone should be able to talk to everyone else. Schools, UCAS, everybody else could key into this and the data could work around. You don't end up with one monolithic single database but a distributed set of databases which has other advantages.

And so on to the challenges.

When I do a diagram of the relationships I tend to do it very carefully so that the Plymouth circle is bigger than the FE

circles. This is important when one tries to understand partnerships. It's not an equal relationship. So you've got a non-equal relationship and you've got slightly different agendas for different types of institutions. Then of course when you look inside the circle for any one of those institutions they've all got their own little groups, senior management have got their own projects, MIS have got their view and registry (who want student data) have got their own view. Enterprise in one particular college with people involved had the problem of actually selling the sign-up to the partnership and the institutional commitment because it's not all funded by JISC. They had to sell it to everyone else and you get an interesting set of problems in there. One of the key aspects I think is that there are sub cultures within institutions and people have their own views within their own part of the organisation as to how things work.

Then there's the communication - there are never as many arrows on my diagram



as there are units in the organisation. That's because communication never really works well in the organisation does it? So we've got 5 organisations all trying to talk to other sub groups of those organisations all trying to talk to each other.

Then of course within each of those sub groups you've got what Charles Handy (a writer of management) would term as role culture. Everything is defined in an organisation - you do what you do - of course down in this corner in one organisation we've got Mr Jobs Worth and over in this corner in a different part of a different organisation we've got Ms Jobs Worth and they're there to do what they are required to do on a day-to-day basis and somebody's come along from somewhere else in the organisation saying 'We want you to do this' - but it's not their job.

So our cultural issues stemmed from different primary interests. There was some common ground and, to be fair, we tried to build on that common ground but why did we end up with different primary interests? Partly I think so that we could have something that fitted the university's needs and fitted the JISC call. JISC calls never meet exactly what you want to do so you try and fit them together.

Doing the day job first and 'We do it this way' were also quite big issues for us. When you're looking at business processes and how you register students everyone has their own way of doing it. We were trying to stitch together 5 different ways of carrying out a process. When we were looking at modules the colleges seemed to have their own view on which modules they were doing. The university had a prescribed set of modules but it hadn't really told the colleges too well what that list was. And of course the university had long ways of working on things. When new courses come on stream it takes months and months to go through the system. The colleges knew the courses were happening because they were talking to the academics in the university so they were listing them anyway and the colleges were trying to update data with module codes on it that the university didn't think existed yet. Another issue in this area was that one of the colleges only registered their students once for a three year course whereas the university registered its students every year of the course. We didn't discover that until the last six months of a three year project because these things weren't properly documented so they could be sorted out.

Then there's the issue that one part of an organisation is signed up to a project but actually the IMS group in the corner over here have to do the work. They have to modify their student record system to get this data out in the right format but the money's gone in elsewhere in the college so they have extra work but not the money to do it. Different levels of buy-in from individuals I've already touched on. Lack of standardisation - we've heard from other speakers how important standardisation is and I've given a number of examples. The project made assumptions that some of these things would be in place as I said at the start 'This is an existing partnership so surely they have sorted some of these things out ...'

We also had to work with an external development company. We tried to recruit someone to undertake the technical activity but working with xml or working with web services is a difficult area to recruit in. We found a local guy who ran his own company, we had to use him in the end because we couldn't recruit, but of course he had his own agenda which was meeting his bottom line in his company. The technical team didn't really work because with outsourced technical development

there was no real buy-in from the institutions. That's a difficult issue because working with IMS and xml you're at the cutting edge and there's not always that skills base there.

And of course cultures change as institutions change. We had a new Vice-Chancellor two years ago and were a leading learning and teaching institution. We now have a Vice-Chancellor from a Russell Group background and we're heavily moving into research. The whole institutional focus has changed and senior managers and deans have changed. Suddenly a project that had senior management buy in at the start suddenly found itself out on a bit of a limb and actually flowing against the general tide of institution. To that end, although SHELL is successful, there wasn't support for us to bid to continue this into the regional e-learning pilots (JISC Distributed e-Learning Programme) which would have been ideal for taking this forward.

We also put a lot of effort into building the partnership. I think one of the key things was this open regular sharing of issues of the project board. If you're going to have a project board and a project team you must have a project team between institutions. It's absolutely critical that this works in a proper and open way, that you can have blood on the carpets during the discussions, and people hold their hands up and say 'Yes we haven't done this' or 'Yes we did try but it didn't work'. One of the real big keys for me is to actually get the right representatives on that group and to be able to get senior staff intervention when necessary. There were also a number of project teams with representation from each of the partners: Business Analysis & Implementation; Learner Record & Standards; Technical; Evaluation & Dissemination. The Business Analysis & Implementation team worked really hard although they still didn't find the single versus three year registration issue until two and a half years into the project and the Technical team didn't really work due to the outsourcing already mentioned.

We tried very hard to get institutional buy in but it's getting a whole institutional buy in that's the difficult bit. The day job often took priority so we had to shift our goals and that largely meant not doing some of the things we set out to do. What we did achieve was a real understanding of how difficult it is working across institutions.

However we did build a working software solution. There is data exchange in FE institutions into the learner record database and we've got lots of records in there now. We have an ability to input data into the Plymouth student record system. There is a student portal in which students can view their own data as they move around and we've demonstrated that all the main objectives can be met using the infrastructure we've built so I think that is a reasonable measure of success. I think the success measure is about 60% of what we set out to achieve but there are a number of projects that are taking SHELL forward within the regional e-learning pilots so hopefully the software will live. If anyone is interested the ioNode software is open source and freely available from the site listed below.

References

ioNode <http://www.ioagent.org>

JISC DeL Programme

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_edistributed

JISC MLE4LL Programme

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_mle_lifelong2

SHELL <http://www.shellproject.net>

Editors' Note

If you're interested in the things Bob has to say about institutional cultures and sub-cultures you might like to look at the section on 'Understanding your Organisation' in the Creating an MLE infoKit.

If you're interested in the issues about business processes you might like to look at the infokit on Process Review.

Both can be found at: <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/InfoKits>



About the Speaker

Tony Toole is Director of On-line Services at Coleg Sir Gâr and the National Coordinator of the Wales e-Training Network. He has successfully managed a range of collaborative e-learning initiatives such as the South West Wales e-Training Network, involving all FE & HE institutions in the region and also completed R&D projects investigating key issues such as The Authentication of On-line Assessment, Remote Technical Assistance for On-line Students, Content Interoperability across Multiple VLE Platforms and the development of Accessibility to e-Learning Content and Delivery Systems for the Disabled.

Tony Toole

Culture Change

The perspective I'm going to look at is based on the Wales e-training network which is a network of all the FE and HE institutions in Wales all collaborating in the development of e-training solutions for SMEs. Clearly we had to address the FE/HE divide, the cultural divide, in achieving our objectives. The way I look at the cultural differences between the FE institutions and the HE institutions is that it's really a subset of a much broader cultural change that needs to take place if e-learning is going to actually succeed.

It's the broad cultural perspective that I'd like to talk about. As far as we are concerned when it comes to cultural change it's largely to do with the existing education system and the way it doesn't really support the development and delivery of e-learning. We're looking at structures, processes and procedures that are barriers to be overcome and these barriers exist at several levels. They exist at individual level: individual members of staff who feel threatened by new developments. At institutional level: institutions not sure about how it's going to help them and also at the political level in determining education policy. There are a lot of things to be addressed and the changes that need to take place at all of those levels that seem to me to be so fundamental that they really do represent a new educational paradigm. I know this has all been said before in other arenas and maybe we, as an e-learning community, only half believe that statement and maybe we only also half understand what it really means. We do however need to have it in the back of our minds when we're addressing any sub-set of cultural change. So what do I see as being the characteristics of this new educational paradigm that make it so fundamental?

We're looking at educational cultural change in e-learning across educational boundaries and it has certain characteristics. First of all I would suggest that in the new way of doing things we'd have to get rid of the academic year. What we're doing is creating e-training solutions for SMEs. SMEs are not the slightest bit interested in being told that they'll have to wait until next September before you can start any training. They're not interested in vacations and they're not interested in term times. What they want is the piece of learning that they want right now at the point of need. To have anything other than a completely flexible system just will not work for that kind of lifelong learner. In Wales we're looking at addressing the needs of those lifelong learners and we have 24/7 delivery: all of our stuff is online every day of the week. Doug mentioned he identified someone in Tesco who was studying at 5 o'clock in the morning. That is the case: people do study at odd

times of the day and if we're not providing a support system that caters for that then we're not embedding e-learning in a totally effective way.

Home working is an interesting issue. At Coleg Sir Gâr (Carmarthenshire College) in South Wales we've got 16 tutors who are supporting our online distance learning courses. All of them work from home. Two of them don't even live in Wales - they live in Yorkshire. If this is going to be embedded as a really serious delivery mechanism across education there are issues like that that need to be taken into account. The fact that they work at home is not only convenient for them, it means they can also be flexible about the way they support students. They can be working at 2 in the morning or at weekends if that is the way they are happy to work and support the students.

This clearly raises a lot of issues. If you've got a sizeable proportion of people in your institution who are not actually there then you don't need staff offices for a start. There are implications here for the way education might move on. If you've got flexible delivery then you're working during times when conventional education might be on vacation so you've got to have flexible holidays as well. The staff who are engaged in this will work like everyone else outside education and negotiate their holidays at the times convenient for them throughout the year.

Then we come on to some more, perhaps contentious, aspects of design. When we're considering the business models, the sustainable business models, for e-learning development then conventional ways of funding education just don't work. For a roll-on roll-off programme where you've got people starting at any point during the year and ending at any point during the year, and progressing at different rates then an educational system which says we're going to allocate you a target number of students for September and we're going to give you funding for that time is not going to work. Apart from anything else the predictability of the number of students you're going to have at any one time is very difficult. Our business model says you turn the whole thing round and pay on outcome. If an institution is being highly successful in the delivery of e-learning and throughout the period of the year they are retaining this number of student outcomes then you pay on that. It sharpens the focus of the institution for a start because it gets paid on results but it's also very attractive to the funding bodies because they're getting value for money they're paying on success. That is why we're looking at this and I don't think it's an unreasonable way of looking at it.

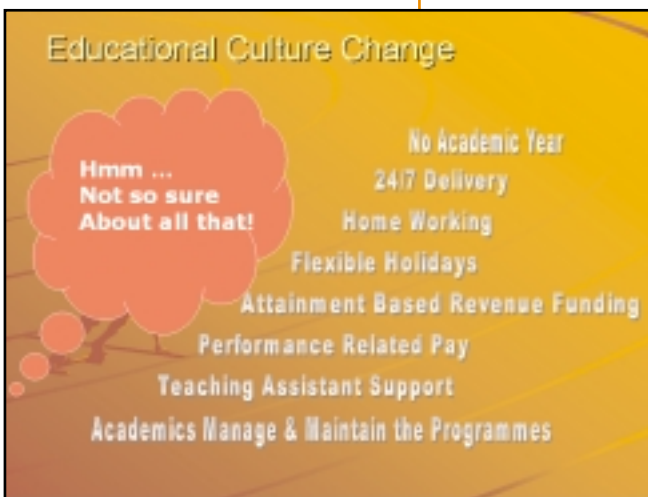
This might be slightly more contentious: performance related pay where the tutors are paid on results. Senior managers within institutions tend to raise issues around home working. They're saying 'We're paying for so many hours per week to support these students - staff are working at home - we don't know what they are doing and we can't see their work patterns so how do we know they are earning their money?' Actually we do know they are earning their money because we have ways of discussing things with them so that we know what their activities are. Once again you can turn it around and say what you're going to do is pay on results. If a tutor is particularly effective at supporting their cohort of students and they are getting above average outcomes then they get above average salaries and if they aren't being so effective then maybe they get slightly less than the average salary. You might think 'You're never going to get that past NATFHE' but the fact is we have done in Coleg Sir Gâr. We've been negotiating with NATFHE for over a year and we've got a model in place which we are implementing this year in

parallel with the standard contract. We're observing how effective it is by mapping how much each individual would have got on the standard contract. It's going to be interesting but it really does mean that the incentive is there for the staff to put a lot of effort in to effectively supporting the students. This really is a priority and these are the kind of things we'd want to do anyway.

Now here's another thorny one for academic staff: teaching assistant support. What's actually happening online is we've got a number of tutors supporting students engaging with online materials and that is not a high level academic activity. It's a relatively low level academic activity and a lot of it is actually administration, record keeping or moderating discussion boards and things like that. To my mind if you've got really skilled academics engaged in that activity you are wasting their talents and experience. It can be done by teaching assistants who are perfectly capable and skilled in dealing with the activities involved. They are more than happy to do it as part of their stepping up the academic chain and of course it's more cost effective. What it does is it releases academics to do what they are really good at i.e. managing the actual teaching materials online themselves. I actually worry about what happens to the materials once they've been created and you've got your vast repositories of all sorts of interesting materials. Who maintains those materials? How do you make sure that they are current? How do you make sure that the maintenance is there to ensure quality improvement and all the rest of it? That's the job of the academic. Their expertise will make sure that that all happens. In this model academics are valued for what they are good at: maintaining world class materials and they're assisted in the delivery by teaching assistants. Of course they can have high level input at points, such as tutorial inputs or perhaps blended learning sessions on campus, to add to what teaching assistants and the online materials are doing. It is more a case of buying in their usage to make it an efficient system. The cultural change that's involved is really quite difficult but these are the things that we're thinking of: it's a big issue.

Educational Culture Change

I've got one example to finish this summary of cultural issues and that is what's actually going on in Wales at the moment and what the implications are. We're a multi-institutional operation: it involves all the institutions in Wales. Pockets of people within those institutions are part of the project. The focus of our work at the moment is developing a foundation degree in e-commerce. We're all developing modules. At the moment there are around 14 or 15 institutions, out of the total of around 40 in Wales, who are collaborating in the development of foundation degree modules to a broadly agreed teaching model. Clearly we've got to have the same learning model for the whole thing to keep it workable. We've got distributed development which is resulting in distributed resources. What we've got in terms of resources is 10 credit modules in different aspects of e-commerce all coming together. Not only are we individually working to a model we're also sharing all the materials involved, showing each other materials on a regular basis, discussing learning design and trying to ensure coherence in what we're doing. In terms of quality assurance we've got peer assessment. Subject specialists in one institution



are reviewing the materials produced by colleagues in other institutions so there is a level of trust required that is unusual. Any of you who have been involved in the development of e-learning materials will know that when you go through a quality assurance process involving critical appraisal of the effectiveness of those materials this is unusual in education. Normally, the individual academic doesn't have somebody there to critically appraise the way in which they deliver their learning. That is a difficulty but, once you get used to it, you see that it's a positive process.

There's a lot of talk at the moment about setting up digital repositories. The JISC funded JORUM project is coming along but we are managing things slightly differently in this particular example. We've got distributed resources but they remain distributed. They remain in the institutions around the country that created them and they are then maintained by those same people. We're going to need a single sign-on access to all these distributed resources. We have heard about the work that has been done by the SHELL project and the work that's been done by the NIIMLE project in Northern Ireland. We're involved in a new project (SUNIWE) following on from these initiatives to see if we can use some of that technology to achieve single sign-on access in Wales.

At the same time, if it's achievable, we'd like a dynamic learner record of the type we've heard about within SHELL where information about attainment in each of the distributed centres is coming into a central portal. All the student sees is the course, the learner record and general resources and support staff don't need to know where all those resources are or where all the tutors are.

One way of interpreting what we have got in Wales is 'Wales the College'. In addressing the cultural issues between FE and HE we've established a method of operation which de-institutionalises the entire process. Where the institutions are, who the institutions are and whether they are FE or HE will no longer be relevant in the way we're doing things. Now doesn't that sound wonderful? Does it work in practice? Within the project it does work because we've got individuals and because it's a project but of course all of the people involved have got their day jobs and the conventional system doesn't work that way. If this is really going to work then the whole educational system that supports it has got to change. That's really the message we're looking at - the FE/HE divide is a sub-set of a much greater cultural change required.

References

JORUM <http://www.jorum.ac.uk>

NIIMLE <http://www.niimle.ac.uk>

SHELL <http://www.shellproject.net>

Wales e-Training Network <http://www.swwetn.co.uk/contacts/team.htm>



Debate



‘Joining up learning across organisations is for the benefit of the institutions/government and not the learner’

For the Motion: Mark Stiles

Opposing the motion: Sal Cooke

Mark – I’m going to start off by trying to curry favour with you by saying that whilst I am a professor I did work in Further Education for 15 years. I’ve also spent many years as an IT Deputy Director in a University and I’m currently involved in JISC projects looking at work-based learning and involving small to medium enterprises. Clearly this is a contentious motion and in proposing it I’m not so much acting as devil’s advocate as representing an entire demonic grimoire or if you prefer a Star Wars reference, ‘Luke I am your father!’

First of all I have to come clean and say, you could indeed join up the systems we use for delivering and supporting learning across organisations in such a way that it would greatly benefit the learner. So, to an extent, the argument I’m putting forward is based on tense. I’m saying that currently it isn’t though of course it could be.

Clearly the current culture that we work in frames the activities that we carry out and I would argue that, despite all the rhetoric, hardly any systems used in universities, colleges or the government could honestly be regarded as seriously learner, client or customer centric in the real sense. I’m not saying that there aren’t any but I do think that we have to come clean and say that in general it isn’t the

Mark Stiles

Mark Stiles is Professor of Technology Supported Learning at Staffordshire University where he is Head of Learning Development and Innovation. Mark and his team are responsible for managing, facilitating and supporting e-learning across the University and for research and development work in the strategy, policy, technology, pedagogy and interoperability issues associated with e-learning. He has been involved in numerous projects for the JISC and other organisations, including developing the free COSE VLE, the CO3 project with Bangor and Huddersfield, the SURF X4L project and the Staffordshire ICE project which investigated the interoperation of VLEs with eBook aggregators.



case. How many of you have MIS systems that are learner-centred? One of the classic things about organisations, and I spend a lot of time in systems development, is that organisations until very recently have always developed systems that are largely for the benefit of the organisation and not the customer or the student, or the learner. So it's quite an interesting position. We have this huge legacy of 'what's in it for us' with systems backing it up. You might think I'm being cynical but I think I'd prefer to think of it as realistic.

At institutional level we have all sorts of systems emerging, we have VLEs, marketing systems, systems for recruitment, enrolment systems, systems for fees, learner record systems, transcript systems, we have PDP systems emerging, we have portfolio systems, we have repositories and portals. Now to look briefly at just a couple of those; a whole string of JISC projects have recently shown that certainly student record systems in FE colleges give very little information that's actually of any use to the learner. There's more of benefit to the organisation, or more importantly, the funding body. So that puts us in an interesting position to start with. Secondly, transcripts: I was required by the Engineering Council to send transcripts of my undergraduate degree. I graduated in 1971 so it was 1968 to 71. I was quite impressed that Leeds University could actually supply it. I rang up and they said 'No problem, just give us your card details' and I was in receipt of it in two days. The transcript revealed that I had failed a course in Russian for Engineers! It has hardly blighted my life but it would be nice to have some control over what is presented to people and what isn't. I'll come on to e-portfolios later because that's an area that involves us all. So, not very learner-centred then (apart from portals).

Why might institutions want to join their systems up? First of all consider your Chief Executive. What really rings the bell of the Vice-Chancellor or Principal? I think what would work with our Executive is a pitch along the lines of 'It will improve student recruitment and improve retention. It will satisfy the funding body. It will get rid of some staff. It will meet policy and inspections and targets.' Those are the things that ring the bells of executives. The rest of it I think is firmly what we believe we do but it will not exercise their minds. When we get round to joining up systems across sectors we've already looked at the demand for student record information to be passed from FE to HE to benefit the learner and to benefit the organisation. Is there a hidden agenda here? Is it about recruitment rather than progression? What's going on with integration is largely about management and reporting rather than about enriching the learning experience which is what I'd want to think about: after all it's what I believe in.

So let's leave the systems of the institutions and enter the systems of the government because when you get to government you've got a very interesting thing going on. When you start talking about any government the first thing you need to consider is 'What's the real agenda? What does lifelong learning mean?' I think it's about enriching people's lives and enabling them to exploit their potential for the duration of their life. I rather think that governments see it more as satisfying the government's real needs. There are undoubtedly people in government who really believe in enriching people's lives through lifelong learning just as there are chief executives who believe in giving people sound learning experiences. But I think that what everyone's really looking for is a nice flexible and re-employable workforce because that's the thing that will satisfy the government agenda.

We can start looking round at an awful lot of stuff that we're doing at the moment with lifelong learning. From the institution's point of view - ask yourself 'Is it really about empowering the individual or is it really about de-institutionalising things?' There's an awful lot hidden away in the lifelong learning agenda that eats away at the concept of the university or the college. We have already heard about examples of tutors in a Welsh college working in Yorkshire.

It gets worse as you dig deeper - to e-portfolios. One of the interesting things relating to the e-portfolio discussion is the concept of a national data warehouse and MIAP. Currently in a lot of large companies Human Resources adopt a view that if there is an opening for a promotion you may only apply for it if you meet the criteria. Now if we have a national data warehouse I can see in the future you'll be applying for a job and you'll be told you can't apply for this job because you failed Russian for Engineers! In other words are we in danger of not just producing a nice flexible and re-employable workforce but a commodified workforce and I think there is a real agenda in there that we need to be careful about. Is the reality about joining up systems being about enabling lifelong learning in the real sense or are we in danger of actually producing a rather cowardly new world?

On that basis I'd urge you to vote for the motion because the benefit is there or the potential for the benefit is there but the motion says 'is' and not 'could be.'

Sal - I think there is a real issue here because the people who are passionate about learners are the people who are delivering this - in fact they are doing what the motion is telling us we're not doing! I'm going to give you some examples and then I want you to really think about the area that you work in. We've heard about a range of projects and you will know that in your own institution, in your region, sub-region in whatever sector you're in, these things are happening for the benefit of

Sal Cooke

Sal is Director of the JISC TechDis service. She came to TechDis from a very wide background in e-learning. Originally teaching in Schools and Colleges of Further Education, Sal was seconded in the 1980s to work as the Curriculum Development Officer responsible for the integration of IT in post-16 education in Yorkshire and the Humber. From this post Sal was further seconded to various national agencies such as Ferl, Becta, JISC and more recently to the Standards Unit at the Department for Education and Skills. Through this role Sal also sat as a member of the e-Learning Programme Board working on the e-Learning Strategy.



the learner. The key thing that is happening is that staff are recognising that it's about them and their job role and how they impact on the learner as practitioners.

I want to give you an example. I've anonymised her, the college and the area but she exists, believe me. She's on the MIS system at Anytown College. Shelley - 14 and a half years old with a year old baby and a mother of 29 who is also on Anytown College's books. That means she's a grandmother at 29. She's also on the university's books because she's become a learning champion. She's come through ACL (Adult and Community Learning) this grandmother who has looked at her pregnant daughter and said 'I don't want her to end up like me.' She has become a champion on the estate where they live through ACL, through UK online, through the networks, through the People's College and the TUC. All of those things that are happening on the estate have made her able to come into social work and are now taking her into a foundation degree. At the same time, she's now badgering her 14 and a half year old to do something with her life. This is a live situation that is happening now.

How does this mean that we're achieving it with institutions? The school is working together with the college, the LEA, everyone across that sub-region, but equally the likes of ALT, Becta, JISC: all of those support agencies that have enabled the resources to excite those people to be there. That's not a figment of the imagination, that's happening all of the time! The trouble is we're so caught up in academic rhetoric that we tend to forget to go and look at what's happening on the ground. The materials might not be perfect, but people are using them. People might snub the BBC website or prefer another but people are using them because they are there and it's a gateway in. Even if they're just using the Fimbles as a learning experience. If you haven't been on the website I don't know why - it's a fabulous teaching resource! The point is that the infrastructure is there that allows for 34 UK online centres to be linked in Anytown through the likes of the JISC technical forum and the RSCs' expertise. People who go to the ALT, NILTA or UCISA conferences are getting together and making a difference. And it's the people in the jobs who care passionately about the end product, for want of a better word, which is the learner, who are really making a difference. I think that we are absolutely, at this moment in time, finding that there is a huge raft of people out there who care passionately about the learner. I totally dispute that it's about institutions and it's about the government. It's about the people who work in those places who are making it happen for the benefit of the learner.

How many of you are from, or have involvement with, LTSN, Subject Centres, now HE Academy and work with practitioners in their subject bases? RSC people what do you do? You run subject based events you know the way to attract a practitioner is to have an impact on their day to day lives: we do it all of the time. UCISA has its staff development groups covering a whole range of issues, ALT has its groups: it's happening repeatedly - all over. People are working together and the end result is that they want to improve the learner experience.

If we take the Shelley scenario she's actually using the Becta materials and the NLN materials and the reason she's using them in the school is because the tutors from the college have had visits from the staff at the RSC and NLN mentors have shown them to the school and the school is now getting cross information so that they understand that those things are there. Exactly the same thing is happening in the college because the LTSN stuff is in the college because someone has actually

been from the foundation degree, from the University and seen them. We're seeing all of this at local level with practitioners who are making a difference.

There is a caveat and I agree with Mark that there is a time lag because you've got some other agencies and some other institutions that are perhaps not so joined up but we're getting there –because we're poking them! So, I'll just mention that the other side of the equation in Shelley's life is the father who is in HMP Full Sutton. I'm not sure how long he's there for but he's there for a while. He is the grandfather of the baby. The college that has the contract to train prisoners is down the road - not Anytown College (273 FE colleges have contracts to deliver training inside prisons). Prisoners are not allowed the internet or allowed mobile phones so trying to figure out how we're going to get all of the materials from all the agencies into establishments where they can't have the internet is quite a challenge! Where do their staff get the information? From all their other colleagues who go to all the support mechanisms. They don't go to ALT, at a guess, but they are working in an institution where other people do therefore we've got cross-fertilisation.

If institutions are not there about the learner then I'm not quite sure why we're all here. The key person we're there for is the learner, whatever anyone else thinks of that, we are there for the learner and I think the way that LTSN in its previous guise, the way that the RSCs and every other support mechanism that exists including in college and university staff development will recognise the only way to affect policies is to talk directly to the practitioner about the thing that's relevant to their job role. Staff development officers will know how to get staff development people together to talk about relevant issues if they think it's going to have benefit on their own job role and their learners.

Summing up, going back to my family on their estate in Anytown. If we weren't talking the way we're talking, and the universities and the colleges, the school and the LEA, and the other agencies, we would not have a situation where a 29 year old grandmother could walk through the door of a UK online centre and do a foundation degree (whether or not we like foundation degrees and think they're working). And it's not just one family in Anytown. You'll all know of something similar, whatever the topic is. I say again we are here for the learner.

Questions from the floor

Question to Sal. What is it that actually benefited the two generations that you've talked about? Is it the fact that learning is open or the fact that it is joined up?

Answer – I'd say it was two things; one is that it's by local people in their local patch. It's about people with the correct language: the whole thing about accessibility and inclusion. It excited them because it's a totally different kind of learning. It's completely different to the grandmother's previous experience where she actually stopped going to school when she was about 12. She's got a totally new outlook on learning and it's the fact that it's there on the estate and in her world and in her language that's attracted her to it. The fact that she can talk to her daughter about this vast array of e-learning type activities has actually caught the imagination of that youngster.

Further question – Exactly, but how does that tie in with the joining up? What is it that is joined up that previously wasn't that has benefited her?

Answer – I think the availability of all the resources across all of the support agencies. Anytown is a particularly interesting city because it has things going on there as well but at the same time the fact that you've got Becta, JISC resources, and the BBC coming together, and more importantly you've got people who visit and show teachers how to actually embed that material into their working practices.

Question to Sal – Sal has a real passion and espousal of the cause and it was all about people and how they connect. Wondered what degree to which she believed people really connect to the system rather than in spite of the system?

Answer – One thing I didn't say is that I started teaching in schools. The critical thing is that those people used to meet; they used to have meetings of some description involving LEAs etc at whatever level but the issue for them was that they never had a shared resource. The repositories are now sitting out there on the web and they can say that we've used it and it worked and they've actually trialed things that in a practical sense worked in everyday teaching. Every school in Anytown has an interactive whiteboard in every classroom – primary and secondary. The college invested in 195 whiteboards and then asked the school teachers to come and train us how to use them- if that had happened before we would never have acknowledged that we were behind the school sector.

Question – to Sal – I think that the agenda of governments and institutions is pretty obvious but how do we recognise benefits to the learner? Other than the access to resources that you mentioned.

Answer - If I take the situation about employability – how many of you have an employability project in your universities, etc? When has it actually touched the real life situation? A classic case is Bird's Eye – they can't recruit – we might be talking about degrees but they're taking about NVQ Level 1: practical impact. How do we get those people from that estate into work in a large industry that's just arrived in Anytown? We need to be very practical so that we can measure in those sort of jobs worth.

Follow on Q – so does that mean that the government and institutional agenda is linked to the learner benefit?

Answer from Sal – Actually you can swing the argument both sides – it's very cleverly written, you can argue it both sides as Mark espoused earlier on. I think that the difficulty is how you separate the government agendas – particularly from the FE or the ACL or the work-based areas. The difficulty that we have to recognise or the positive thing we have to recognise is that it's the people who deal with those who really care about their learners and how they're making a difference and we don't measure any of that. So I'm still not answering the question – on purpose!

Answer from Mark – The problem we have is all of these good things are going on but they are dependent on the practitioner. They are not in many, many cases really there because the organisations have got their acts together. They're dependent on the fact that we, and this is the point, it is we who are passionate about it and are making it happen and are talking. Agencies are talking together, what I don't see is systematic joining up that actually reflects agendas other than making the organisations work.

Point from the floor – I'd like to say that a better run organisation, or a better

managed organisation is going to provide a better product or service to the learner aren't they?

Answer from Mark – I would agree with that but sadly an awful lot of effort going into joining up systems tends to be along the lines of reinforcing the organisation's current shortcomings organisationally. If you could use the opportunities of new systems to do some serious business process engineering you would be quite right but an awful lot of what you do see is not actually based on that happening as some of the people here from some of the projects can attest.

Question – Sal mentioned this 29 year old grandmother becoming a learning champion on her estate. But she didn't actually say what that means. What is the feedback from her social peers? Are they supportive? Are they bewildered? Or have they just ostracised her because she's betrayed them?

Answer – No, and the other thing is that she's not the only one. I'd love to show you a video clip of a young man who is like a Big Issue seller but he doesn't sell Big Issue he sells training. He gets all of the other druggies out there in Goole (which has a worse situation than Anytown) out there off the docks going to the Centre which is now a combination of the College, the University, the Social Services, etc. It's all happening. Given the opportunity these people do turn into learning champions. They do become mentors for each other. It's amazing to see the difference. This young woman that I'm talking about was probably the first of her breed. She really does make a difference. She's one of many 29 year old grandmothers but she's made the difference, she's actually stepped forward to a higher level of education than her peers who perhaps may have done a little and stopped. She's now taken it a huge amount further and is visiting people in homes, counselling people, working with people from the college and the university to decide how best to meet people's needs differently.

Point from the floor – This isn't really a question it's just to highlight that in the four years since we've been involved with e-learning we've spent around £800,000 at our College. If we went to our Principal and said we're going to spend £800,000 and it's going to give better resources to the learner we'd have been thrown through the window without the window being open. So Mark in that case you're right we did have to take a different approach and say 'Look there's a new opportunity offering benefits in terms of new markets'. Now, four years on, we've got the infrastructure, we've got the content in place and our Principal's coming to us now and saying 'Well what's the learner getting out of it? How can we improve the learner experience?' because they can now see how it is creating new markets and if we can improve the learner experience then we can compete not just on a local level but on a global level – and it's come a full circle so it's a draw!

Summing up

Mark – I was very moved by Sal's passionate espousing of it all but the important point is actually the point the last gentleman made – that indeed within individual institutions we have in many cases gone through the arguments and we're now starting to see benefits and we're now starting to recognise them. When we start

talking about joining across organisations we're still at the point at which you were when you were trying to get the Principal on board four years ago. In other words we're going back round that loop and really at the moment I think this is the position. The whole point of what Sal's been saying is that there's been a big movement amongst practitioners, people talk to each other very effectively, they help each other, they're getting real benefits but the systems aren't joined up. It's because if you want to achieve real culture change you also have to change your organisational context. I've learned the hard way that you can put masses of effort into staff development, etc but if the organisational rules don't match what you're trying to achieve, after you've trained them they all slip back to their own ways very rapidly because the rules under which they operate make them. My point here is that if we're going to achieve real change in terms of inter-organisational joining up we also have to attack institutional process, cross-institutional processes and organisational culture at the same time.

Sal – If I can be pedantic: where does it say in the motion about systems? The way I read the question it was about the learner or the learning process. You might need back-office systems but you need to integrate with the learner. It may be systems, it may be the whole range of things but I'm really talking about learning. I would implore you to really think seriously about what you know is on your patch where you are and vote against the motion.

Vote - The motion was defeated.



About



Whether you are a senior manager leading institutional strategy or you are working in the field of systems, processes or e-learning, JISC infoNet has resources that can help you improve the support for, and quality of, learning and teaching in your institution. These are freely available to institutions and individuals in the further and higher education sectors, with our website providing the main access route to our materials.

Our series of infoKits cover key topics relating to the lifecycle of planning and implementing information systems. The infoKits are a set of online resources that consist of a subject overview, a step-by-step 'how to' guide and a resource layer made up of reports, case studies, templates and other supporting materials.

To accompany the infoKits, we run series of regional one-day workshops in association with the JISC Regional Support Centres (RSCs). Current topics include:

- Effective Management of e-Learning
- Learner-Centred Process Review
- Risk Management
- Email Management

The Association for Learning Technology (ALT) promotes good practice in the use and development of learning technologies in tertiary education. ALT-C is the premier learning technology conference in the UK tertiary sector and our largest international event.

We run an annual one-day spring conference and monthly workshops. ALT also runs free events, such as policy meetings, exclusively for members. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in learning technology, and to organisations which use, promote or develop technology for learning. Our publications include a quarterly newsletter (ALT-N), an international journal (ALT-J), books and a fortnightly email digest. From 2005 our newsletter will also be published online with RSS feeds.

(Contact details on the back cover)



Glossary

ACL	Adult and Community Learning
AoC	Association of Colleges (http://www.aoc.co.uk)
Athens	Access Management system providing users with single sign-on to numerous web-based services throughout the UK and overseas. (http://www.athens.ac.uk)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation (http://www.bbc.co.uk)
Becta	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (http://www.becta.org.uk)
Connexions	An information, advice and guidance service for young people aged 13-19. (http://www.connexions.gov.uk)
COSE	Creation of Study Environments VLE http://www.staffs.ac.uk/COSE/
CO3 Project	Archived site at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=project_co3
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (http://www.dfes.gov.uk)
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales (http://www.elwa.org.uk)
FE	Further Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HE	Higher Education
HE Academy	The Higher Education Academy (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England (http://www.hefce.ac.uk)
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (http://www.wfc.ac.uk/hefcw/)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency (http://www.hesa.ac.uk)
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HOLEX	Local Adult Learning Providers Network
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILT	Information Learning Technology
IMS	Instructional Management Systems (http://www.imsproject.org)
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee (http://www.jisc.ac.uk)
JORUM	JISC Online Repository for Learning and Teaching Materials (http://www.jorum.ac.uk)

LEA	Local Education Authority
LIP	Learning in Process (http://www.learninginprocess.com)
LTSN	Learning and Teaching Support Network now The HE Academy (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)
MIAP	Managing of Information Across Partners
MIS	Management Information System
MLE	Managed Learning Environment
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (http://www.natfhe.org.uk)
NHS	National Health Service (http://www.nhs.uk)
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (http://www.niace.org.uk)
NILTA	National Information and Learning Technologies Association (http://www.nilta.org.uk)
NIIMLE	Northern Ireland Integrated Management Learning Environment (http://www.niimle.ac.uk)
NLN	National Learning Network (http://www.nln.ac.uk)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education (http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)
OLP	Open Learning Partnership (http://www.olp.org.uk)
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (http://www.qaa.ac.uk)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (http://www.qca.org.uk)
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise (http://www.rae.ac.uk)
RSCs	JISC Regional Support Centres
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals (http://www.scop.ac.uk)
SHELL	Southwest Hosts Enhancing Lifelong Learning (http://www.shellproject.net)
SHA	Secondary Heads Association (http://www.sha.org.uk)
Shibboleth	An architecture that enables organisations to build single sign-on environments that allow users to access web-based resources using a single login. (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=pub_shibboleth) (http://shibboleth.internet2.edu/)

SLC	Student Loans Company (http://www.slc.co.uk)
SME	Small-Medium Enterprise
SUNIWE	SURF, NIIMLE, WETN – A cross-regional project designed to build on the work of NIIMLE by implementing IMS Enterprise Web Services to provide access to learner information for students using uPortal, trial implementing this work within the SURF and WETN consortia, and expand it to provide personalised links to VLEs and other eResources via the portal.
SURF	Staffordshire University Regional Foundation (http://www.surf.ac.uk)
TUC	Trades Union Congress (http://www.tuc.org.uk)
UCISA	Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (http://www.ucisa.ac.uk)
ULN	Unique Learner Number
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VRE	Virtual Research Environment
XML	Extensible Markup Language
X4L	Exchange for Learning – Building and Sharing Community Resources (JISC Programme) (http://www.x4l.org)

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