

What can we Learn from the Demise of the UkeU? Evaluation of the Lessons Learnt

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an evaluation of the UkeU and the lessons which can be drawn from the experience. The study is based on two data sources: interviews and a study of documents. Semi-interviews interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders involved in the UKeU, including members of the learning technology team, representatives from SUN and the HEI partners. In particular we explore the relationship between the documented UkeU vision and how this was instantiated and its impact on practice. We will consider the way in which the UKeU was understood at its start-up (and even before), the aspirations it had with respect to the public/private partnership, and with respect to the roles and backgrounds it would need to bring together; and the acknowledgement of the difficulties it would face.

Keywords

Evaluation, UKeU, online learning

INTRODUCTION

With the growth of e-learning (Conole, 2006), institutions have become increasingly interested in exploring the potential to develop international alliances and different business models for distance learning (Guri-Rosenbilt, 2005). Business models range from the internationally recognised model developed by the OU through to franchises and more contextually located models. This period coincides with a dramatic increase in participation in higher education (HE) which is likely to continue given the Government's widening participation aim to increase participation in HE (DfES, 2003). E-learning is seen by many as one means of supporting this and as an essential element in delivering HE efficiently and effectively to a diverse, mass audience. However, as Oliver (forthcoming) points out

‘Many projects like the UK eUniversity, NYU Online, Scottish Knowledge, Universitas 21 and Global University Alliance, which all developed around e-learning applications, have failed to realise their aims and goals leading many to question the quality and capabilities of this form of educational delivery (Garrett, 2004).’

He goes on to state that a range of good and bad practice exist and poses the questions, what are the necessary conditions for successful e-learning and can these conditions guarantee that e-learning will be successful? Furthermore, as Conole et al (forthcoming) point out

‘One side-effect of rapid technological progress and the rhetorical discourse which dominates is the continuing but elusive suggestion that technology can ‘transform the ways we teach and learn’ (DfES, 2005). In reality, this can potentially lead to unfortunate decisions. The most publicly visible example in recent years is the demise of the much promoted and publicised UKeU. At its launch the then secretary of state proudly announced that: “...it is clear that virtual learning is an industry which is striding forward all around us...” (Blunkett, 2000). When it collapsed only five years later, Sheerman suggested the investment had been “... a disgraceful waste of public money...” (Sheerman, 2005)’

Salmon (2005) points out many see new business opportunities emerging through the application of e-learning and that associated teaching paradigms would somehow change. But she goes on to quote ‘in practice, e-learning is complex and involves considerable individual and institutional change, beyond the provision of technology’. This paper reports on an evaluation of one global e-learning initiative, the UkeU, reflecting on the lessons learnt.

Carr-Chellman (2005) states that ‘online education has been heralded as the next democratizing force in education’. The UKeU was initiated in response to a perceived need to be a key player in packaging UK HE

internationally (Bacsish, 2004). A number of reports had put the size of the global market for e-learning at several billion dollars, in part due to general economic growth in countries experiencing rapid development and modernisation, and in part due to changes in demographic patterns. But perhaps most significantly, there was a view that it was due to the ever growing individual and corporate interest in continuous professional development (CPD) and in lifelong learning, which aligns with the Governments current thinking with respect to e-learning developments (HEFCE, 2004; DfES, 2004).

This paper will focus on the experiences and lessons learned of those involved in UkeU. In particular we will explore the relationship between the documented UkeU vision and how this was instantiated and its impact on practice. The paper also explores the roles of the different stakeholders, their perceptions of the project and their inter-relationship. We will consider the way in which the UKeU was understood at its start-up (and even before), the aspirations it had with respect to the public/private partnership, and with respect to the roles and backgrounds it would need to bring together; and the acknowledgement of the difficulties it would face. The question the evaluation raises is to what extent the experience gained from UkeU apply to other e-learning initiatives, which by their very nature bring together people from different backgrounds and sectors, and where course developers are forced to interact with administrative and management departments to a far greater extent than the average academic putting together a face-to-face course. Further research is urgently required into the nature of these relationships and the roles of team members.

Context

The most important contextual factors that led to the founding of the UKeU were the desire to remain a global player and the perceived need to create a united front for UK HE (ref document). In the face of developments in the global e-learning market, there was a concern that if the UK did not make a strong presence, it would lose out to competitors. The UKeU would unite HEIs, thereby creating more of an impact together than any of them could hope to create individually. It was predicted that there was an enormous market for higher education e-learning courses, and that the enterprise, though needing to be subsidised initially, would soon (within 5-6 years) be profit-making.

The UKeU initiative was initiated in response to a perceived need for the UK to be a key player in packaging UK Higher Education internationally in a distance learning format (ref). A number of reports had put the size of the global market for e-learning at several billion dollars,(ref) in part due to general economic growth in countries experiencing rapid development and modernisation, and in part due to changes in demographic patterns. But perhaps most significantly, there was a view that it was due to the ever growing individual and corporate interest in continuous professional development (CPD) and in lifelong learning, which aligns with the Governments current thinking in this area and in particular its relevance to e-learning developments (HEFCE, 2004; DfES, 2004).

The solution to this perceived threat (and opportunity) was to mobilise the use of learning technologies and hence it was the advancement in technology which provided the springboard for these developments. Conventional higher education was perceived as providing high quality learning materials, rich in depth, to relatively small and geographically concentrated groups of students. Whereas distance learning has the potential to provide learning experiences with a wide geographical reach to students irrespective of their location. Furthermore internet technology allowed the delivery of learning which has both richness and reach. It allowed global access wherever a dial-up connection could be provided – already millions are on-line, and the numbers will grow exponentially in the next few years. The development of broadband technologies (with faster connections and transmission of data over the internet) was also thought to further increase the scope for richness by enabling more interactive and content-rich web experiences, with the feel more like that of an interactive television.

The e-University, as an idea, was conceived not so much to respond to what others were doing, but to enable the UK to take a lead in this emerging world of e-learning. It is clear that the brand created by the e-U should have a high impact on launch and then sustain and grow it.

The UK e-University business model was based on a critical mass of high quality learning materials being available on-line. These materials would be wrapped around by learner support and administrative mechanisms, commissioned in response to an identified demand, or offered by institutions and other organisations wishing to contribute to the e-University. It was recognised that, at least in the early stages of the e-University, the portfolio of courses on offer was likely to be supply-driven. Therefore, the opening portfolio of the e-University will be influenced by the availability of existing on-line learning materials. To help generate the required mass of appropriate and effective learning materials, the e-University planned to make a major investment in content and tools in the initial phase of development.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on two data sources: interviews and a study of documents. A clear set of contrasts has become apparent from these two data sources. The documents focused upon have been those which attempt to set out the framework in which the UKeU would operate, and are future-oriented, aspirational documents. The interviews instead are past-oriented and allow us to trace how those aspirations were put into practice, or – in many cases – not. Five semi-interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders involved in the UKeU, including members of the learning technology team and representatives from SUN. This is part of a larger evaluation of the UKeU experience. The second phase of research resolves around interviews with members of HEIs involved in the UKeU initiative.

Interviews were taped and transcribed. A coding scheme was developed and used as the basis of the analysis using NVIVO. The coding scheme was developed iteratively by two researchers and included a range of categories covering different aspects of the UKeU experience. Interview fragments were grouped into a series of themes. Firstly, references to the establishment of the UKeU and the aspirations behind the project were coded, as well as the context (at international, national and institutional level) within which the UKeU was set up. Secondly, references to the pedagogical approach adopted were identified, including the underlying pedagogical model used, the nature and types of activities developed and subject specific differences. Thirdly, references to the development of the platform were drawn out, including the architecture and specification used, the notion of learning objects and comparison with other commercial Virtual Learning Environments. Fourthly, the nature of the organisation itself and its internal processes and relationship to HEIs were coded. This included information on the business processes within the organisation and organisation issues which arose. Also considered were the staff development activities put in place, the marketing strategy adopted and the relationship with SUN and the HEIs involved with the project. Finally, references to the organisational culture which existed within the UKeU were identified and in particular the tension between corporate and academic sub-cultures.

ASPIRATIONS

The UKeU was set up with an ambitious set of aspirations, which with hindsight might at least be considered somewhat naïve. Firstly, that the e-U would be an entity that will be different from, as well as ‘better’ than the other current offerings: ‘better’, not only in terms of its offerings, but also in terms of being proactive for tomorrow’s needs. Secondly, the e-U would capitalise on the UK’s strengths, knowledge, reputation and experience and exploit the opportunities provided by the ‘new economy’ technology and by the rapidly expanding markets. Thirdly, the e-U would be able to respond to demands and adapt in advance of others and so stay ahead. Fourthly, to take a global lead, the e-U would need to grasp new ideas in imaginative ways – even though some of them were recognised as being risky.

The main aim given for the concept of the e-U was to provide the opportunity for the flagship provision of UK higher education excellence using digital channels, primarily abroad but also at home. The interpretation of ‘excellence’ was that it should mean ‘excellent fit for purpose’: each e-U offering would be the best of its kind and best suited to its target market. It was anticipated that the result would be an expansion of the UK’s overall share of the global overseas markets for higher education; an expansion which built on, rather than substituted for, existing UK provision as far as possible. The benefits to UK HEIs were thought to be that each one would be able to contribute to the e-U offerings (subject to quality conditions), and would have financial and other help in doing so, and that all would also benefit from a general expansion of the UK presence and profile overseas.

A second aim was to support and promote the expansion of lifelong learning at higher education levels, particularly in the form of continuing professional development, but also offering a means to help increase social inclusion. The concept of e-learning, as a development of distance learning, would provide opportunities for learners who otherwise would not be able to take advantage of higher education (such as people with certain forms of disability). The e-U would help to provide access for such groups.

In addition to these external aims, there was a third, more institutionally focused aim. Experience suggested that the development of e-learning would require significant modifications to the traditional paradigm of the supply of higher education. Furthermore, the production of high quality e-learning is costly. Thus the aim was that the e-U concept should encourage and facilitate new thinking within UK universities and help them develop and make imaginative use of the emerging e-learning technologies. Again this was seen to be of value to all UK HEIs. The e-U aimed to show by its example that online learning could, and should, be of high quality while also being interactive, flexible and exciting.

ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

Examination of the UKeU from the perspective of its organisational processes is important, as it helps us to understand the way in which the organisation operated and developed. In this section we consider the documented aspirations of the UKeU, and the resulting organisational processes which were identified at the start-up of the organisation. We then examine the reality of organisational processes as the company developed, as evidenced by documents and interviews with former UKeU employees and HEI partners. The scope of processes addressed in this report is limited to those identified through sources examined/available to date. These represent a range of processes internal to UKeU, between different departments/groups, and also its external facing processes which interfaced with the HEI's. The points which come to the fore from our study of the organisational processes cluster around the fact that are that:

- there was an acknowledgement of the UKeU as a private/public or corporate/academic partnership;
- there was a perceived need to put in place organisational processes which would allow for the smooth running of the business of the UKeU;
- there was a tendency to see these organisational processes as optimal if they were 'business-like';
- there were no processes, or other means, set in place in order to attempt to address the differences between the different sectors that the UKeU, by its very nature, brought together;
- there was a gradual further accentuation of the business or corporate nature of the organisation at the expense of its academic aspect, and an increasing corporate / academic rift.

The most significant point to emerge from our analysis is the importance of means whereby institutions can broach these differences, be this via formal organisational processes or more informal means.

Aspirations regarding organisational processes

The aspirations concerning organisational processes for the production of the learning materials were that:

The production processes adopted for learning materials production would need to [1] ensure that specified quality standards were met; [2] enabled learning materials to be produced cost-effectively; [3] supported distributed and multi-partner production; [4] be sufficiently flexible to cover a variety of modes of operation; [5] be subject to continuous process improvement, including adaptation in response to developments in C&IT; [6] enabled learning materials to be produced rapidly to an agreed timetable; [7] facilitated project planning, resource allocation and monitoring; [8] be straightforward and simple to apply.

There was an awareness of the need for efficient organisational processes (for example, with respect to course and content production, platform development, costing and timing. There was a recognition that these processes would require the right kind of teams working on projects, as well as flexibility and that these would need to be multidisciplinary, as one policy document stated:

“Such teams should comprise programmers, multi-media developers, instructional designers, subject experts, pedagogical experts, graphic designers and project managers.”

The need for training staff was also pointed out as a contribution that the UKeU could make to the HE sector:

“One way in which the e-University could address skills shortages would be by offering or sponsoring training programmes. This could benefit the whole sector.”

While one issue was the composition and staffing of these teams another was how the team members would work together, and how the various teams would work. There are therefore questions relating to the internal

processes and procedures within teams, and the processes and procedures between teams, or the different sections of the UKeU.

The UKeU was a cross-sector enterprise in that it was a public-private partnership, and also in that it brought together academic and corporate interests. This was not unprecedented in the e-learning sector as many of the units responsible for e-learning in HE institutions already either used business-like practices or were semi-commercial and had experience of the need to formalise procedures, and to make all team members aware of their role. There was also already an awareness of the fact that “this business-like ethos made [these] unit[s] look significantly different to a typical university department, leading to a change in the relationship between them and the university.”

The documentation and interview data evidence clearly indicates that there was awareness that the UKeU would be forging new models for every aspect of learning, including the production, development, administration, and delivery of materials, all of which would take place on a much larger scale than had been seen before in the HE sector, bringing together people from different backgrounds in non-traditional working arrangements. Moreover, this was set against a business background which purportedly understands the need for efficient organisational procedures. However, in key documents reviewed to date (notably the Business Model and the OCF Summary Report), there is no explicit mention of the difficulties that may be expected in this regard.

Planning for organisational processes - documentation

During the early stages of the formation of the UKeU consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) were tasked to produce a document to specify key organisational processes. This document uses IDEF0 to model core organisational processes, which would enable SUN Microsystems to design and build the systems and infrastructure required to run the organisation. Consequently, this model focuses on a set of enterprise-wide business operations, but does not include a full scope of organisational processes. Instead, the document explicitly concerns itself with business operations required at that point which it describes as “steady state”. It specifically notes that “The model does not cover any aspects of migration from contract negotiation with Private Sector Partners to delivering the first batch of Learning Programmes”, thus excluding a number of processes associated with transition and business start-up. The reason for this may be firstly, that start-up and transition processes are perhaps “exceptional” or “unique” and were not well understood at the time; secondly (and more likely) that the processes scoped were those which the Sun system was to support – which were scoped to assume a “steady state” operation. With respect to this modelling document it can be noted that:

- (1) none of the processes seems to be addressed to the work carried out by the learning team, and Learning Systems is not mentioned in any of the ‘Process Actors’. In fact, with respect to learning, only the Director of Learning Programmes is mentioned. This may be because it is not seen as part of the ‘steady state’ picture.
- (2) the processes do not make explicit inter-relationships between academic and business sectors, except in the most perfunctory way.

The lack of ‘joined-up’ or more holistic thinking may reflect the immaturity of the UKeU organisation at this stage; alternatively, or in addition, it may be a feature of such models that they do not capture the complexity and evolving nature of the institutional and inter-personal relationships.

Implementation of organisational processes: Interviews

These were conducted with members of the learning teams, who fulfilled the following roles: Individuals to provide input on the learning environment: ‘critical friends, individuals to support HEIs and contact people between the UKeU and particular HEIs. In the previous section, we mapped out some of the ways in which organisational processes were made explicit, or attempts at so doing. In the interviews, there were frequently expressions of frustration and observations concerning the lack of processes and of organisation. For example how the role with respect to HEIs could be fulfilled depended to a large extent on circumstances within individual HEIs. This much is to be expected; however, the circumstances often included the organisational processes within the HEIs themselves, and in particular the way in which the decision had come about to work with the UKeU in the first place, and by what internal structures the decision was being enforced.

“But again I think what is important is your understanding of the context that we are working within was that the Vice Chancellors, or some of the Vice Chancellors, had bought into the vision of UKU.

They in turn went along to their people within the Universities and said that we want a...our institution to be involved in this which then de-stabilised fairly mature systems and infrastructures.”

With respect to the role that had been provided for, of there being some consultation with the learning team before the contract with the HEI was signed, in order to see what was required in terms of UKeU input, and whether it was achievable, the ideal situation has been described as follows:

“An ideal model was that we would get involved as early as possible, from the day it won that potential partner-University [...] (28.45) we should be involved, even at the point of expressing an interest come to that [...] one of the most valuable things that we could do, we could go along and scope them out really early...”

It was at this point that the initial ‘Techno-Pedagogic Reviews’ were meant to be filled in, by people from the UKeU going to potential partner HEIs in order to begin to find out what would need to be done. That this was accepted as the procedure to be adopted seems to have been broadly agreed upon by the UKeU management. For example, in a document titled ‘Course Development Milestones’, the first point is:

“*Contract*. This is most meaningful if preconditions to contract are a realistic staffing plan, approval for the programme from the HEI’s Academic Board and sufficient prior contact with the UKeU Learning Systems and Programmes teams to ensure a clear understanding of the requirements of the development process.”

The pre-contract stage is further elaborated upon in a document which seems to have existed only in draft form: ‘Learning Programme - Pre-contract process - Working Draft’ [see Appendix 5], but which seems to be an attempt, by the Learning Programmes Team, to fill in the processes whereby the condition above could be met. However, it seems that these processes were not properly instituted or implemented. While contracts were sometimes extremely legalistic, complex and long – possibly indicated the mistrust between the UKeU and the HEIs – there was often no input from the learning team, as they had not been consulted: For example, there were various ‘quality assurance processes’:

“If a course had been through an institution’s own processes there was also...[...]... the committee for academic quality within UKEU and [...] part of what I would do, is that I would write reports on basically what I thought. The weak point in that, I was usually writing such reports after the event. In other words, a course had been implemented and I was writing it post hoc and I would say “I have some concerns in this situation” or “this is very good”, you know ...”

It was felt that had the learning team been brought in at the early stages of negotiations with potential partner institutions, they could have ‘headed off a lot of problems’. In fact, this interviewee felt that in some cases, the learning team could have discovered in advance that on the basis of the learning technology set-up within a potential partner, some institutions were to be avoided. It seems that seeking out and signing up potential HEI partners was driven politically, and from a ‘business case’ – where what was and what was not a ‘business’ issue did not include educational factors.

“You know, this was an example of the tension between commercial and academic values always going in favour of the commercial side [...]paramount for the organisation was doing the deals, getting the people signed up and there was little time for anything else besides that...the drive it was [...] getting the contracts signed and [when we] pushed and pushed and [...] sometimes we [...] got somewhere but [...] even when [we] apparently won and got a chance to evaluate a proposal prior to contract, in practice, though, okay we did the evaluation but there wasn’t really an interest in taking any notice of that, particularly if what the evaluation said [was] “hold on, we need to slow up here”.”

This may have been an ‘immature’ practice, which would have matured with time and been improved. However, one interviewee remarked that:

“an initial tolerance for some optimum processes was viewed as[...] permanent acquiescence to another way of doing things and what was intended as a sort of constructive way of helping things move forward in the early stages then rapidly became institutionalised and became very difficult to [change]...”

Once contracts had been set up, and projects for the development and delivery of courses were set up, there were other difficulties experienced with respect to organisational processes:

Interviewee: “I think one of the difficulties possibly was that UKeU did not have a staff development remit in terms of the pedagogical remit. The staff development and staff framing side tended to focus on the use of platforms, which is obviously important for how the technology was used, so there wasn't a structure as such, although there were people working towards it, there wasn't a structure as such to concentrate on the pedagogical approach so you did tend to, learning technologies to work very much on a one to one basis, one to small group basis with this project.”

It is likely that with whom learning technologists interact within an institutional setting has an important impact on course development. This will be pursued in a further report, on the HEI experiences with the UKeU. Despite project management processes, and despite the ‘Course project milestones’ document, the courses were sometimes never seen as a whole before going live:

“Nobody saw the whole course as a whole, it was a project management problem, the way the whole thing had been designed.”

It was also pointed out by this interviewee that there was a difficulty relating to the vagueness surrounding the role of the learning technologist:

“Perceptions of what our role as learning technologists was, and that perception within UKeU itself. The technology was of overriding importance in UKeU for a lot of people and the learning technologists [...] felt we were on the back pedal. Most people saw us as telling people how to press the buttons. How to put learning objects in and how to do the technical side. For quite a while there was no real understanding of what a learning technologist should be doing.”

In fact, learning technologists seem to have been caught between the emphasis on technology, and the emphasis on commercial interests. The learning technologist's role was not acknowledged as being an academic role within the UKeU:

“a lot of it was misunderstanding what we did, or what we were able to do. A number of us had come from an academic environment, this is much more for people who come from a commercial background. ... The predominant culture was commercial and could have done with being more educational. I think HEIs would have understood that better...”

While structure and organisation are important, the interviewee also noted that this could not be imposed in an overly rigid manner:

“it needed to be more organised, a lot more structured, but in a sensitive way because academics don't like being told how to do things.”

From the outset, there was an awareness that the primary objective of the UKeU could not be simply and straightforwardly profit-maximising. For example, in the PWC Business Model, it is acknowledged that the UKeU's

“wider intentions to increase social inclusion and to disseminate good practice do not sit comfortably with a focus on profit maximisation.”

However, this admission is immediately followed by:

“Of course most aspects of the UKeU's operations will be profit maximising: its management style should certainly be performance driven (see section B8), and it will need to make surpluses so that it is not wholly dependent on external funding for re-investment.”

This tension was to make itself felt in the relationships between sectors of the UKeU organisation, as one interviewee put it “It wasn't really 50/50 public/private.” That there was a rift between the corporate and academic cultures in the UKeU has been remarked upon by all interviewees:

“I've read all the reports in the press of what went wrong, what people believed to have gone wrong, but nobody actually brought that up. There was a cultural misunderstanding between the academic and corporate world.”

There was a lack of understanding of academic culture in general. This was compounded by the fact that the UKeU was dealing with several different HEIs, each with their own internal culture and circumstances. This was put very forcefully by one interviewee:

“The actual complexities...it’s difficult enough working in one HEI and you’ve got an equivalent of a learning systems team within an HEI. That is challenging enough, changing that culture [from] within. And we were coming along taking on a multiplicity of cultures and the problem was that some of the people I was dealing with within UKEU had no conception of what we were talking about. As far as they were concerned these were clients. This was just another client and this was washing machines that were being sold. I have had people banging my table saying “I want you to do this” and I’d say “No, and don’t talk to me like that. I ain’t doing that because it is wrong”.”

The lack of understanding between academic and corporate sectors was felt between the UKeU and the HEIs, as well as within the UKeU itself, between the different departments. Physically, this seems to have been experienced as a lack of communication between different floors, as the different departments occupied different floors. The gradual taking over of learning issues by business issues seems to be reflected in the organisation of personnel and management lines, in which gradually the learning team increasingly fell under ‘Business delivery’ [see Appendix 2]. It is difficult to say exactly what were the motivations behind such a move. It seems, however, that this move has an important effect on the self-perception of learning team members, who seem to have felt increasingly co-opted into the business or corporate side of the organisation.

The culture rift was also felt with respect to what was seen as the primary ‘product’ of the organisation, if seen in business terms. The point here is not that the UKeU should have recognised one or other thing as their primary product, or one or other set of people as their primary client. Rather the point is that despite knowing that they were doing something unprecedented on such a large scale, that is setting up a private/public organisation, in which there would be essential inputs by both academics and business people, there was no attempt to address the academic / corporate division before it became a rift.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have considered the way in which the UKeU was perceived, the aspirations it had with respect to the public/private partnership and with respect to the roles and backgrounds it would need to bring together; and the acknowledgement of the difficulties it would face. We have seen that while mention was made of the need to bring together people from diverse backgrounds, there appear to have been no steps taken to try to smooth the way for cross-sector and cross-cultural relationships formed on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. However, it is a moot point to what extent the problems raised here could have been addressed by modelling processes, which anyway did not exist. More troubling is the difficulty of finding evidence of other attempts to formalise or make explicit the ways in which co-operation could be ensured or facilitated. There are two areas in which this was particularly evident: in the processes involved in developing and delivering a learning programme and in the perceptions of the corporate / academic input, contribution and overall nature of the UKeU.

The question this raises is to what extent does this apply to other e-learning projects or enterprises? These issues are crucial in any e-learning project, which by its very nature – and not only in the particular form it took in the UKeU as a public/private partnership - brings together people from different backgrounds and from different sectors. In any e-learning programme, course developers are forced to interact with administrative and management departments to a far greater extent than the average academic putting together their face-to-face courses. Further research is urgently required into the nature of these relationships and the roles of team members. An important lesson, which was repeated time and again in interviews, is that each project is different, and that learning teams need to respond to the particular needs of each project. How to ensure co-ordination while respecting the individualism, idiosyncrasy and unsystematic working processes of most academics is probably one of the biggest challenges facing e-learning. The UKeU represents one of the most significant case studies into large-scale e-learning yet undertaken. Its early demise sounds a warning note to all of us involved in e-learning. It is important that we learn from this experience so as not to replicate its mistakes, but also not to allow its failure on some levels to drown out the enormous potential and good practice which it instituted on other levels.

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