

11. Symposium: How is it for You? The Impact of Networked Learning on Educational Institutions

OVERVIEW OF SYMPOSIUM

Aims and Rationale

Educational institutions, both further and higher education, are becoming places of almost endless change, and the growth of networked learning is only one of the many changes our institutions are adapting to, or embracing. The changes include rapid growth in both student numbers and student diversity, decreased government funding per student, institutions becoming involved in new markets and new business ventures to increase income, and the growth of borderless education (www.obhe.ac.uk). Educational Institutions are expected to embrace the rapidly changing technologies that are potentially allowing for different modes of teaching. The UK government recently published a new document – Towards a Unified E-learning Strategy (www.dfes.gsi.gov.uk/consultations2/16/) and Charles Clarke, secretary of state for education and skills exhorts HEIs to engage in the challenge of making full use of new technologies (THES, 11th July 2003). The government's paper recognises that web-based instruction has already been developed in higher education and that it is seen as increasingly important by these institutions (Traxler, 2002). Most HE and FE institutions are now engaging with the networked learning in some form or another.

Given this context of change can we identify how the move towards large scale networked learning impacts on our educational institutions? How can we ensure that this innovation is sustainable?

A number of case studies exploring the introduction of networked learning on an institutional scale have been carried out (Beaty, et al 2002, Banks & Powell, 2002, Cornford & Pollock, 2003). Others have examined the implications of large scale networked learning from a multi-institution viewpoint (e.g. Inglis et al, 2002). Even so, the development of networked learning, especially large scale networked learning, is still posing considerable challenges for institutions and for the individuals within these institutions. As we become more experienced in using technology to support networked learning the focus of attention has moved from the technology itself, to the pedagogy and now to the type of organisation(s) needed to implement effective learning (Moore, personal communication, 2003).

This symposium will examine the interplay of factors that influence the extent to which institutions are engaging in networked learning and the extent to which such innovation is sustainable. The symposium will focus on three aspects of sustainability: the impact of policy and strategy on practice; the effect of staff attitudes; and the impact of innovation on lecturers teaching. Each paper will present a view of sustainability – the institutional framework; the effect of staff attitudes on the implementation of that policy; and the impact of such policy on staff teaching practice. They will each highlight what they see as the key relationships between these areas.

Participants at the symposium will be asked to debate with speakers and each other, how we might use policy, strategy and practice to address the issue of sustainable innovation, how policies affect what we can do and how the experience of actually engaging in large scale innovation could feed back into policy, strategy and practice.

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Organised By: Carol Higgison