

CULT Project (Creatively Using Learning Technologies)

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Introduction

This document offers a brief overview of the University of Worcester's (UW) participation in the Higher Education Academy's Enhancement Academy Programme in 2009-2010. This participation followed on from the University's successful involvement in Phase II of the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) eLearning Benchmarking Programme.

In line with other cohort institutions that participated in the HEA eLearning Benchmarking Exercise, the University of Worcester reported an encouraging level of staff engagement with learning technologies. However, the majority of this activity entailed rudimentary use of our VLE as a repository for teaching materials and Powerpoint presentations. At that time, the introduction of an e-portfolio tool and pilot projects using a variety of technologies began to demonstrate the potential of learning technologies to support interactive student centred learning activities.

Consequently, UW submitted a successful expression of interest for the Enhancement Academy Programme that articulated our wish to encourage and support staff to emulate the 'early adopters' who are using learning technologies more creatively to support active student centred learning. We regarded this as an important dimension of addressing our key institutional objective to provide an outstanding student experience through measures to improve student retention, progression and achievement. Our students indicate high levels of satisfaction with their experience at the University (as measured through, for example, the National Student Survey), but we consider that this satisfaction does not yet translate through into year on year improved student outcomes as measured by key performance indicators (e.g. continuation and pass first time rates, completion and degree class outcomes).

Project Management

The progress of the project was overseen and monitored by a Steering group that consisted of academics, support staff, University managers, a student and a so-called 'critical friend' from University of Hertfordshire.

The project team consisted of

John Colvin - Project Leader

Debbi Boden - Deputy Director of Information Learning Services

Ian Scott - Head of Academic Practice and Development

Libby Symonds - eLearning Team Leader

David Antell – President of Students Union

Planning Stage

The newly formed Project Team headed off with HEA facilitators and colleagues from other participating Universities for a three day intensive "Retreat" in Leeds on 2-4 June 2009. The team went with very ambitious plans for the project, but on sharing our plans

with other teams, it became apparent that we were tending to be too ambitious and that we should consider targeting the project on more achievable outputs.

The focus of our project emerged as the development of an on-line collection of learning materials and the delivery of a significant number of workshops for staff wishing to use learning technologies creatively. The intention was for the learning materials to be available via a web portal and their use to involve active learning e.g. a tutorial for an audio editing tool Audacity was created using the screen video capturing software Camtasia.

The project team looked to involve teaching staff, support staff and students in the project in a number of ways for example:

- delivering 'Talking Heads' promoting individual learning technologies or promoting the creative use of learning materials in general
- creating learning materials for uploading to the portal
- moderation of learning materials
- delivering Workshops/Seminars to colleagues
- supporting colleagues at Institute and universal levels.

Project Implementation

CULT Launch Event

The University hosted a launch event for its CULT project on Wednesday, November 11th 2009. The project team had already developed the CULT website containing a collection of learning materials that includes overviews, recommendations, self-teach materials and relevant links for a number of eLearning tools (<http://www.worc.ac.uk/ils/cult/cult.html>)

The launch event was formally opened by Professor Judith Elkin and the audience enjoyed a keynote speech delivered by Professor Derek Law (Chair of JISC Advance). Derek's keynote was entitled 'Headlights on Dark Roads' and offered a thoughtful reflection on a number of e-issues including, inter alia, digital content, the behaviour of digital natives, our digital footprint and the students experience. This was followed by an opportunity for delegates to use CULT webpages and to discuss its content with the staff who developed and contributed to it. The project team were particularly pleased to welcome more than twenty delegates from partner institutions and from other Universities.

CULT Website

The CULT website (<http://www.worc.ac.uk/ils/cult/cult.html>) allows access to a collection of learning materials for colleagues at the University and at its partner institutions wishing to use learning technologies creatively. These materials, for the large part, have been developed using the tools that the CULT portal promotes and are intended, themselves, to encourage active learning.

The creation of the website was a collaborative effort between Information Learning Services and Academic Development & Practice Unit, but has also involved contributions from many staff and students from other parts of the University of Worcester and from staff at other Universities and academic institutions.

The CULT website is organic and the Project Team intends to improve and extend the current content. Internally generated multi-media materials for the website are located on Release (the University's media streaming service).

Workshops

Planning at the Leeds team meeting proposed that we hosted a number of staff development workshops that offered training in the technical and pedagogical aspects of a number of Learning Technologies. Eleven workshops were staged in February and March 2010 and focused on the following: Audacity, Blackboard, video production, Second Life, blogs, Captivate, E-tivities, PebblePad, e-Learning design and Flash. These were delivered by both academics and support staff at the University and its partners. We believe that it is worth reporting that firstly, one of our partners, Pershore College successfully delivered one of these workshops and that secondly, a significant number of staff from partner institutions attending these workshops. We also acknowledge and thank Herefordshire & Worcestershire Lifelong Learning Network for funding a significant element of the cost of these workshops.

Additionally, it was decided to deliver a series of Institute workshops (see below) that targeted their individual needs. These were part-funded by the Academic Development and Practice Unit and were delivered by academic and support staff. It is worth noting that a support department (Student Services) asked to be included.

Institute	Activities
Education	Screen Casting, eLearning Frameworks, On-line classroom (WIMBA), Image manipulation, video, VLE
Health & Society	eLearning Frameworks
Humanities and Creative Arts	eLearning Show & Tell Session
Science and the Environment	Screen Casting
Sports and Exercise Science	eLearning Frameworks & Screen Casting
Business School	On-line classroom (WIMBA)
Student Services	Screen Casting

The funding from ADPU has allowed the Project team to provide all delegates who attended a CULT workshop with a 2GB USB memory stick.

Conclusions

Although still on-going, we believe that the CULT project has been of significant benefit to our University. The successful CULT project launch event attended by over 20 external delegates has enhanced the external profile of the University. The project has enabled the creation a significant on-line resource (CULT Website) for staff wishing to use learning technologies creatively which is currently receiving over 150 viewings per month. Additionally, the CULT e-learning themed staff development events have attracted around 350 delegates from academic and support staff departments. Although it is too early to attribute the reported increase in use of learning technologies by staff to the CULT project, this is an encouraging trend for the University.

The success of the project stems both from the endeavours of the project team and from the support received from the HEA Enhancement Academy Programme. The HEA events were well organised and relevant, and it is noted that the delivery in these events was adapted and innovative e.g. Dragon's Den Exercise. Although collaboration between institutions outside centrally organised events may not have fulfilled expectations, the team greatly valued the informal and formal input from other institutions at centrally organised events. For our project team, the usefulness of the critical friend was not so much for the 'advice' given, but in terms of the questions asked, the challenging of assumptions and the 'critical friend' being able to reference experience and examples elsewhere. The University of Worcester thanks the HEA for accepting our Expression of Interest and supporting this project.