

Cross-institutional Provision

What institutions really need to know

What JISC is doing

The development of applications, systems and infrastructure to support multi-institutional provision is a major theme across all four strands of the JISC e-Learning Programme. The e-Learning Programme website (www.jisc.ac.uk/programme_elearning.html) is regularly updated with links to developments, outputs and resources.

JISC is leading, with international partners including the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), an initiative to build 'the e-Framework for Education and Research'. This is a common, service-oriented approach to the development and integration of computer systems in the sphere of learning, research and education administration. The Framework is the result of a shared conviction that it is better to expose networked functions, such as user/group data or learning content, as simple services rather than as features locked up inside monolithic systems. This approach offers institutions more flexibility, more scope for pedagogic innovation and better return on present and future investment.

Distributed e-Learning regional pilot projects are exploring the use of e-learning systems and tools across a number of institutions across HE and FE within a region to facilitate wider participation in HE and provide better opportunities for lifelong learners. These pilots are focusing on facilitating progression, collaborative teaching and sharing of resources across institutions, and supporting the independent lifelong learner. Further projects in this area are planned for 2006.

JISC is also funding projects aiming to define a web services architecture for the support of e-learning locally and for the sharing of resources across regions and sectors, including models for course validation and exchanging course-related information.

The Exchange for Learning (X4L) programme has produced staff development resources promoting emerging practice in e-learning across multi-institutional contexts.

A programme aiming to build on previous multi-institutional development projects for HE in FE provision is planned to commence in 2006.

JISC infoNet offers an advisory service for managers in the post-compulsory education sector promoting the effective strategic planning, implementation and management of information and learning technology to support the core activities of learning, teaching, research and business processes.

JISC Legal is a free information service offering high quality legal information to FE and HE relating to the use of ICT, including data protection, human rights, IPR, freedom of information, disability, e-security and cyber crime.

This briefing paper has been edited by Glenaffric Ltd e-learning consultants with support from Professor Mark Stiles, Head of Learning Development & Innovation at Staffordshire University and representatives from the JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme.

Alternative formats of the briefing paper can be found at: www.jisc.ac.uk/publications

Further information and resources

JISC MLEs for Lifelong Learning Programme

www.jisc.ac.uk/elearningfocus/mle

and

www.jisc.ac.uk/mle_lifelonglearning_info.html

JISC e-Learning Programme

www.jisc.ac.uk/programme_elearning.html

JISC Legal

www.jisclegal.ac.uk

JISC infoNet

www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk

DfES e-strategy (2005) Harnessing Technology:

Transforming learning and children's services

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy

HEFCE strategy for e-learning (2005)

www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2005/05_12

HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006–11 Consultation

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2005/05_45/05_45.pdf

HEFCE Regional Priorities

www.hefce.ac.uk/regions/priorities

Foundation Degree Forward

www.fdf.ac.uk

Realising the Potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges, DfES 2005

www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation

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Briefing Paper

March 2006

Key messages for senior managers have emerged from a three-year JISC programme on MLEs for Lifelong Learning. Ten multi-institutional projects worked across different sectors and organisations to support student learning and progression. The programme highlighted a range of issues associated with the strategic oversight of developing and managing cross-institutional partnerships, including higher education (HE) provision in further education (FE) colleges and Foundation degrees.

Policy context

Focusing on the strategic management and operational issues for cross-institutional provision across a wide range of educational contexts, the programme has been able to explore the use of technology in multi-institutional partnerships to address national policies for widening participation, inclusion and work-based learning, and to assess their potential impact on the medium-term strategic planning of technological and pedagogical development.

The 2005 DfES e-strategy *Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services* emphasises a collaborative approach to the provision of personalised learning, and plans for an integrated teaching, research and administrative network for education. The strategy proposes common systems and open standards for electronic learning, administration and business. Cross-institutional partnerships are seen as a way of enabling all schools, colleges and universities to progress, and the development of functional collaborative partnerships is an explicit strategic priority.

The 2005 HEFCE *strategy for e-learning* proposes a partnership approach to institutional e-learning development, encouraging approaches to collaboration, progression and student support to help embed e-learning in broader policies and activities, joined up across sectors within and outside education.

Foundation degrees, launched by the DfES in 2001 as the first significant new HE qualification in 25 years, aim to change the design and delivery of degree-level education, bringing institutions and employers together to create a blend of academic and work-based learning.

The 2003 White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions* set out the Government's plans to decentralise powers and strengthen regional policy. Building on the success of devolution elsewhere in the UK, the Government's aim was to empower the English regions and create the conditions for better government, improved service delivery, and greater prosperity for all. In association with various agencies and bodies, HEFCE has produced a series of regional development priorities for HE in each of the English regions, based on partnership working between the education sectors, public sector bodies and private enterprise.

The 2005 DfES *Realising the Potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges in England* highlights a potential tension in the policy drivers for partnership working and HE in FE provision, balanced by a clear strategic imperative for the FE sector to develop its primary purpose of improving employability and supplying economically valuable skills.

'Partnerships with other educational or professional institutions, engagement with parents, local collaborative networks, and liaison with local employers can all help leaders and managers to learn from other organisations and from those who rely on their services.'

DfES, 2005

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'Universities and colleges have a growing part to play through local, regional, national and global partnerships, sharing expertise and facilities to support regeneration and growth.'

HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006–2011 Consultation

What this means for institutions

The strategic and policy drivers for cross-institutional provision have implications for institutions in a number of key areas. The task of addressing these agendas calls for a holistic understanding of the role of ICT and e-administration in facilitating and managing developments in support of:

- Widening participation and inclusion – through appropriate partnerships HE institutions can extend the reach of their provision as well as increase student numbers and participation in traditionally under-represented areas
- Retention and progression – partnerships supported by technology provide opportunities for improved retention and enhanced transition between institutions, courses and levels
- Regional collaboration – effective partnerships help both to form and to promote regional development priorities for FE and HE

In the longer term, the strategic emphasis on lifelong learning and flexible provision adapted to the needs of the individual and the workforce effectively shifts the locus of control from the delivering institution to the learner. The essentially de-institutionalising nature of lifelong learning will encourage institutions to think about partnership development and genuinely place the learner at the centre of the learning experience.

Key issues and challenges

The experiences of the MLEs for Lifelong Learning projects highlight a number of key issues and challenges for institutions developing and delivering provision across a partnership involving one or more colleges and an HE institution.

Developing a successful multi-institutional partnership

- Fundamental to the success of a partnership is a shared and explicit understanding of the partnership goals, whilst recognising that each institution will have its own development agenda. Partnerships are more likely to succeed when there is synergy between the goals of the partnership and the strategic vision and planning goals of the individual partners.
- Effective partnerships require a clear understanding of the potential benefits to each individual partner and to the collective whole. This includes the practical, business-oriented benefits of collaboration and its impact on medium to long-term financial planning. Institutions may wish to build partnerships based on existing successful relationships that have delivered tangible benefits, identify new partners with strong, demonstrable track records of delivering in other partners, or select partners with directly shared goals.
- Partners need to understand each other's business and educational processes and where these are aligned or misaligned, particularly when working across sectors. The cultures of FE and HE institutions can be very different, as can drivers and priorities, resources and expectations, history and customs, and rules of discourse. Working with such diversity requires careful analysis and management of business processes, and strategic vision underpinned with practical policy implementation.
- Identifying the 'right people' to engage at the differing levels in partner institutions is vital. The ease of achieving this is highly dependent on the extent to which partnership goals are shared and understood at both strategic and operational levels.
- A clear, comprehensive partnership or consortium agreement is a vital basis for the development and delivery of shared provision. The agreement should clarify roles, responsibilities and ownership issues, including IPR and copyright. It is important to realise that apparently operational issues can distort the working of a partnership if not clarified at a strategic level by formal agreement. The agreement should also make provision for the addition or withdrawal of partners.

Critical success factors for partnership operation

- Clear lines of communication are vital, not just between those involved in developments but also at the level of course delivery. This will help to ensure that problems are minimised and dealt with effectively, but both depend on and promote a shared ownership of partnership efforts.



- All staff involved with developing and delivering partnership provision need to be familiar with the terms of the partnership agreement, and in particular the nature of service level agreements relating to provision and support of services to the students and staff (academic, support and managerial) in the partner institutions.
- A tutor–student service level agreement should ensure that learners know exactly what support will be provided and what responsibilities they have for their own learning.
- Staff support needs must be addressed at an early stage, and address ongoing delivery as well as development phases. Support includes educational, technical and business processes as well as shared approaches to enrolment, induction, monitoring and quality. Staff development provision will need to address pedagogical issues of e-learning and blended learning approaches in terms of both course design and tutoring.
- Technical specifications and standards conformance for data transfer and interoperability facilitate smoother administration processes across institutions, including enrolment and access to services, integration of course management information and quality processes.
- Genuine quality enhancement across partnerships is a key issue for multi-institutional provision. Quality management has to be addressed from the outset to develop commonly owned approaches and understandings of quality processes and requirements across the partnership.
- Partnership provision needs to include effective marketing and the support required to ensure maintenance of viable numbers through to the final stages of the qualification or programme.