Are FE/HE staff ICT Competent?:
a report from the tRISSt research project.

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In recent years a number of UK government reports (see for example Dearing, 1997; FEFC, 1999) have made it clear that institutions of further and higher education (FE and HE) need to improve the profile and delivery of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). At the same time, the globalizing effects of a growing technological imperative (Giddens, 1999) have meant that colleges and universities can no longer be complacent regarding their staff's abilities to use ICT as a vehicle by which academic standards can be raised. Consequently, it is now accepted that there is an urgent need to promote the use of learning technologies to FE and HE staff. In addition staff and students will need appropriate support so that they might embed these technologies within a context that is appropriate to their own learning and scholarship (Harvey and Oliver, 2001). It comes as no surprise, then, that during the last few years there has been a steep rise in the number of studies and research reports exploring issues of current need, existing provision and, more recently, the development of structured programmes to facilitate ICT as an effective learning tool, generic to all disciplines (see for example, TALISMAN, 1995; Anstey, 2000; Beetham and Jones 2000; Pavey and Watson 2001; Harvey and Oliver 2001).

While such studies and reports have provided an important backdrop to the research reported on in this paper, none have attempted a UK-wide needs analysis of ICT skills. More particularly, there has been no published research exploring the key perceptions of staff development personnel in relation to the specification of ICT skills across the differing roles of staff, academic and non-academic, in institutions of both further and higher education. In contrast with its predecessors then, but also to

complement their work, this is what, in part, the Recognition of ICT Skills of Staff Project (tRISSt) aims to achieve and which our paper will report on.

The tRISSt project has three main objectives. First, to examine the contrasting ICT needs of differing categories of staff in differing HE/FE institutions. This required a HE/FE sector wide needs analysis of professional development in ICT which has now been completed and analysed. Second, to determine what already exists across the HE/FE sector regarding ICT provision and accreditation, in order that a critical comparison can be made of existing forms of ICT assessment systems. Thirdly, to discover what form, or forms, of accreditation would best meet the current and future needs of HE/FE institutions and staff, to allow recommendations of best practice to be made. Since the project has met its first objective and begun to analyse the data generated from the second survey the team would like to share some of its key findings, in particular those that question the assumption that FE/HE staff are now in a position to use ICT competently and confidently in their teaching so as to develop their students' learning.

(492 words)

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