

TITLE OF PAPER: Academic staff attitudes towards the use and production of networked learning resources.

AUTHORS: Louise Plewes and Kim Issroff

INSTITUTION: University College London (UCL)

SESSION TYPE: Individual Research Paper

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON: Miss Louise Plewes, University College London (UCL), Education and Professional Development (EPD), 1-19 Torrington Place, LONDON, WC1E 6BT.

TELEPHONE: 020 7679 1938

EMAIL: l.plewes@ucl.ac.uk

NUMBER OF WORDS: 500 (excluding references)

FIVE KEY WORDS: Networked Learning Resources, Academic Staff, Attitudes, Production.

CONFERENCE THEMES ADDRESSED: Sub-themes (tutors experiences of e-learning, on campus e-learning, institutional readiness for e-learning, and staff development issues).

PROPOSAL: Follows overleaf

Networked learning resources are increasingly being presented as a cost-efficient means of maintaining teaching quality and effectiveness. The largest cost element in the production of networked learning resources is academic staff time (Chiddick *et al.*, 1997). There are also worries about the status of academic staff in the face of the commodification and automation of teaching (Noble, 1998).

While there have been general, large scale surveys of academic staff views on networked learning (e.g. Haywood *et al.*, 2000; Jones *et al.*, 2000), and the production of networked learning resources (HEFCE, 1999), there have been few in-depth studies of the subject and institution specific context of academic staff use of and attitudes towards networked learning resources (although see Smith and Oliver, In Press).

This paper will present and discuss findings from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with academic staff at University College London (UCL), to investigate staff use of and attitudes towards production of networked learning resources. This research is part of a three-year HEFCE / TOEF-funded project to support the implementation of UCL's Learning and Teaching Strategy (Gibbs *et al.*, 2000) and promote effective student learning.

Fourteen one-hour interviews were carried out with staff from a variety of departments. The data were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Overall, there was relatively little use of networked learning resources, although staff were keen to make increasing use of them in the future. Reasons why staff did not make greater use of networked resources included: lack of funding, lack of technical expertise, and the time necessary to develop such expertise. There was also little use of the internet for provision of teaching materials. The perception of most staff was that the web was primarily for an external audience and for research information. Conceptions of what networked learning could be used for were very narrow, e.g. drill and practice exercises. There was little awareness of VLEs / MLEs, and they were thought to be unsuitable for some of the courses taught at UCL. With the exception of videos and CD-ROMs, externally-created learning resources were rarely used due to the perception that it would take time to adapt them for use at UCL (the 'not invented here' syndrome). There was also little interest in collaborating with other institutions to develop common networked resources. Whilst areas of common ground exist, there were worries about differences in attitudes, culture and students needs between institutions. Several interviewees believed that the development of networked learning resources was not a cost-effective use of academic staff time, due to the large upfront investments and long development times versus the time taken to recoup the initial investment. The reasons for these attitudes will be explored in greater depth in the presentation.

This paper will also present case studies of 2 academics' experience of and attitudes towards networked learning and discuss some of the issues they identified.

The research has developed a better understanding of staff use and attitudes towards networked learning resources at UCL which will inform staff IT training and reward structures, and will be of use to both a local

and national audience of staff, staff developers, university managers, and funding councils.

References

Chiddick D., Laurillard, D., Quigley, G., and Wolf, D. (1997): 'New approaches to teaching: Comparing cost structures of teaching methods', Appendix 2, 'Higher Education in the Learning Society', Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 'The Dearing Report',

URL: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/a2_001.html

Gibbs, G., Habeshaw, T and Yorke, M (2000): 'Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategies in English Higher Education', *Higher Education*, **40**, 351-372.

Glaser, B and Strauss, A (1967): 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research', Aldine, Chicago.

Haywood, J., Anderson, C., Coyle, H., Day, K., Haywood, D., and MacLeod, H. (2000): 'Learning technology in Scottish higher education – a survey of the views of senior managers, academic staff and 'experts'', *ALT-J*, **8 (2)**, 5-17.

HEFCE, (1999): 'Communications and Information Technology Materials for Learning and Teaching in UK Higher and Further Education', HEFCE Report Ref 99/60a, October 1999,

URL http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/099_60a.zip

Jones, C., Asensio, M . and Goodyear, P. (2000): 'Networked learning in higher education: practitioners' perspectives', *ALT-J*, **8 (2)**, 18-28.

Noble, D. (1998): 'Digital Diploma Mills: the automation of higher education', *First Monday: Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet*, **3 (1)**,

URL http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_1/noble/index.html

Smith, H and Oliver, M., (In Press): '*University teachers' attitudes to the impact of innovations in Information and Communication Technology on their practice*', In Proceedings of the 9th International Improving Student Learning Symposium, Edinburgh, September 2001.