

Project Name:

e-learning for mature, part-time HE students at Levels 4-5.

Leadership and Management Strand.

Project Manager:

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Background:

The background to the project is the increased level of participation of part-time, more mature, work-centred learners in an HE world designed to meet the needs of full-time, typically 'post-secondary' students. (Nearly 4 out of 10 HE students are part-time; 66% of part-time students are aged 30+ (Fuller, 2006)). The immediate context for the proposal is the University of Worcester, Foundation Degree course in Service Sector Management delivered at Worcester College of Technology. Learners on this programme have the following characteristics, which distinguish them from the 18/19 year-old, 'first cycle' cohort:

- at work
- part-time
- no recent formal learning
- self-motivated; self-directed
- use work as a basis for learning – but have variable levels of support from their employer
- limited time for learning
- more mature / have greater life experience and expect to mobilise that experience in group work with their peers
- aspirational – see their qualification as a means of improving their career
- less discipline-centred / prefer a more problem-centred approach to learning and
- construct solutions through their own 'lived experience' and 'personal knowledge' (Eraut et al, 2002)
- qualification is only one of many priorities
- view HE as an opportunity – but are also uncertain (Beck, 2004)

Objectives of the Project:

The project aims to achieve a better exploitation of e-learning resources, by the identified cohort, than is currently the case. It will do this by:

- developing systems within the current e-learning framework (Moodle) more sensitive to the above characteristics so that the learning of students is improved
- facilitating a shared 'community of practice' based on the educational institution which acknowledges the work-based nature of much of the learning and the other special characteristics identified above
- allowing the cohort targeted to participate more fully in their learning and achieve more of their potential

Project Approach

The immediate context of the project is the University of Worcester Foundation Degree course in Service Sector Management delivered at Worcester College of Technology. The programme uses an Action Learning / Action Research approach. The team intend to construct on this base a framework of communication which addresses the key characteristics of the group of learners set out above and so encourages them to engage more fully in their learning. Work on the project will therefore be centred on the development of the Moodle-based site for the FDSM programme, in particular the development of communication and sharing tools.

Scope:

A Key Products from the project:

- A Moodle-based, e-learning framework more suited to the particular needs and expectations of part-time, mature students
- A framework which is more interactive, iterative and intuitive which allows learners to:
 - Share their work & life experiences and learning with peers
 - Use this sharing as a means of problem solving on the course and in life generally
 - Manage their learning more efficiently
 - Achieve a sense that they belong to a supportive learning community
- A framework which is transferable to other programmes with similar cohorts

B Out of Scope:

No 'Moodle as repository' development

No focus on needs of immediate 'post-secondary' cohort

No focus on FE learners

Constraints:

Cohort's lack of technical expertise. (Support and training will be available from the ILT team where and when required)

Initial Project Case

Benefits of the Project:

Firstly it is important to achieve the stated aims as learners at the centre of the proposal are an important and growing cohort who are being encouraged to participate in HE. However the particular needs of this group do not feature explicitly in syllabus design and are not fully met through learning support systems.

Secondly, by their nature those learners show a commitment to lifelong learning and, by taking up an HE place after a prolonged absence from education, are typical of the under-represented groups in HE who do not enter at the age of 18.

It is hoped that learners will benefit from the project by a significant improvement in the e-learning support they receive. Those in employment would also benefit from the added flexibility that an increase in blended learning would bring.

Key Assumptions:

The ways in which the targeted group achieve learning are different from immediate 'post-secondary' learners.

The different characteristics of the group are an important consideration in designing a programme of learning and that e-learning can have particular benefits to this group.

The project will be also be fit for purpose for those members of the group who do not share all of the above characteristics.

The identified cohort will continue to present for HE.

The cohort will be motivated to participate in e-learning.

The cohort will have at least the minimum level of IT skills to benefit.

Timescale:

It is intended to complete the project within one academic year, so that it can be launched at the beginning of the following year.

Costs:

£5,000. This will be used to cover the costs of release for the project of the staff outlined below. This sum would allow each of the five participants six days to work on developments.

How will the project be evaluated?

The project will be evaluated first by users – students on the University of Worcester Foundation Degree in Service Sector Management. Feedback from the target group, as the project unfolds, will be used as a developmental tool for the project.

How will the project be sustained?

Hours will be allocated to the project on the team’s timetables to the project to ensure that the project schedule is maintained.

Initial Risk Log

The following table summarises the risks that have been identified that may prevent the project being completed to the required quality, budget and timescale. The probability and impact of each risk has been graded as low, medium or high to indicate the relative importance attached to each element of risk.

Risks	Probability	Impact	Containment Plan
Time management – team’s other priorities	low	high	Allocate paid hours to staff timetables
Unwillingness / inability of current cohort to participate and feedback	low	medium	Course manager to set out benefits of participation; ensure appropriate IT skills levels
The changed e-learning model will not meet the needs of users who do not share all the characteristics of the group	low	medium	Ensure feedback is drawn from a representative sample of users; act on that feedback

Project Team

Donald Kerr	project manager
Louise Davies	WCT Moodle developer
Clare Taylor	module leader / Moodle site developer

Helen Bessant
Clive Matthews

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