



Collaborative Course Design Evaluation Report

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Collaborative Course Design (CCD) – Evaluation Report

The Concept

Evidence from focus group work the RSC team conducted with learners suggested a lack of coherence in terms of teaching strategies implemented by teaching teams was problematic in many courses. This can lead to poor performance, dissatisfaction and poor retention rates, which also affects staff morale and performance. Collaborative Course Design describes the concept of planning the curriculum with a holistic approach to teaching strategies and the design of learning experiences, taking a consistent approach to the use of learning technologies across the whole course.

Although many courses are developed and validated using clear SQA criteria, it seems that, once validated, the development of the curriculum can often become broken down into individual units before being presented to groups of learners. This means that the learning experiences can vary widely and course coherence outlined during the validation process is sometimes lost at the point of delivery. Successful courses can often be attributed to the hard work of individuals and good relationships of small teaching teams rather than the careful planning of coherent teaching strategies.

The pervasive nature of affordable technologies have improved access to hardware and software which allows us now to more easily exploit the learning opportunities that can be enhanced by learning technologies, new media and social software. By incorporating learning technologies into teaching strategies employed, the result is to better engage learners, to encourage learners to take more responsibility for their learning, to develop a positive attitude towards learning, to ensure greater accessibility and bring more flexibility into the curriculum.

It was the intention of the RSC to focus on the processes involved in reviewing existing courses or developing new courses rather than presenting course teams with a prescribed model to provide enough flexibility and new in models of course delivery, organisation and assessment.

The Regional Support Centre CCD – project methodology

All supported FE institutions were given the opportunity to become involved in the pilot phase during 2009. The RSC offered support to course teams to review and re-design courses and exploit technology providing a more consistent approach to its deployment, using the CCD model. Support was as flexible as possible and consisted of an intensive 2 day session which included workshop type activities, discussion, focus groups, and the mentoring of course teams if appropriate. In addition short briefing seminars were offered to the appropriate senior staff to provide an overview of relevant new technologies and their impact on learning & teaching. While a similar proposal was presented to each, in fact a bespoke programme was developed prior to the start of the project in each college.

Change2Day – Enabling CCD

Awareness Raising, Dissemination, Focus groups and Mentoring

An intensive series of face to face sessions held over 2 consecutive days was intended to establish a common understanding of learning technologies, the practicalities of using them and would include an introduction to a variety of them for example; classroom technologies, VLEs, eAssessments, ePortfolios, social software, mobile technologies, video conferencing. The emphasis of the workshops would be on teaching & learning and demonstrating examples of effective practice.

Focus groups and discussions, facilitated by RSC staff, were aimed at assisting course teams to reach a common consensus about the fundamental aspects of the course design e.g. teaching strategies, technologies employed and/or assessment methods. Further specific staff development would be arranged as appropriate.

RSC staff would work with course teams to plan the development activities and support staff through the process of course re-design. During the course development an RSC staff member would act as a mentor, providing support and advice as required to the course teams and attending periodic meetings as milestones were achieved.

Topic Briefings

A suite of briefings, aimed at college managers, on the benefits of using new technologies and the issues that arise would be offered to compliment the CCD work and help to ensure that there is institutional co-operation for the implementation of what might be quite a radical change to course delivery.

The Pilot Projects

Three FE colleges in the region participated in the project pilot phase during 2009; Cardonald College, Langside College and John Wheatley College.

Cardonald College

The proposal at Cardonald College was to work with the teaching team in the Social Care department. The team was interested implementing eAssessment within their curriculum area and in particular exploring the possibilities of on line case study type assessment.

Objectives of sessions

- To ensure that the benefits and possibilities of using eAssessment are clear to all.
- To establish the technologies (both hardware & software) available for course teams to use.

- To determine a strategy which makes a more consistent use of technology across the course (HNC Social Care) that exploits the potential and opportunities of using eAssessment for Learning.
- To establish training needs and create a training plan as appropriate.
- To ensure that accessibility issues are addressed at all stages.
- To agree tasks and timelines.
- To agree the processes which have to be completed to enable a common strategy to be implemented.

The topic of eAssessment was explored with a focus on the range and scope of existing initiatives in Scotland, hardware & software possibilities, the existing VLE used in the college (BlackBoard) and the infrastructure in place to support local use and included a section on question design. A number of new technologies were explored to introduce the staff to some alternatives in particular some web 2.0 technologies used in the context of eAssessment. It was felt that WIKI software held the most promise in terms of the specific course (HNC Social Care) in enabling collaborative work and providing possibilities for assessment. A member of staff within the college who was already using WIKI software with learners joined the group and gave an invaluable insight into the practicalities and benefits of using this tool. In addition Social Bookmarking was seen to offer staff a simple and practical mechanism for staff to collaborate effectively given the range of staff skills and its ease of use. There was agreement on moving the project forward with a view to introducing both these Web 2.0 technologies with learners at the start of the new academic session. The group also agreed to begin to use eAssessment tools within the VLE with support from the eLearning team in the college.

Langside College

The proposal at Langside College was to work with the course team involved with the NC Advanced Technology Studies. It was acknowledged that there existed some areas of overlap which could be addressed with a more holistic approach to the course design and a re-think about how materials in the VLE (BlackBoard) were structured and supported.

Objectives of sessions

- To explore the possibilities of integrating topics and providing more coherent teaching strategies that exploit appropriate learning technologies.
- To establish and agree the role of technology and where it can add value within the course design & delivery, establish any training requirements and create training plan as appropriate.
- To determine common teaching and assessment strategies involving a more consistent use of technology across the course.
- To ensure that accessibility issues are addressed at all stages.

- To agree tasks and timelines.
- To agree the processes which have to be completed to enable objectives to be achieved.

Some preparatory work suggested that the course could be organised by topic or perhaps by skill-set. Sessions included an introduction to a variety of new technologies and then involved a collaborative activity for all of the course team to identify the activities that they undertake with learners and map them to “topics” or “themes” within the course content. This element was aimed at reaching a point where areas of overlap could be identified and appropriate teaching and assessment strategies developed to improve coherence between units and avoid unnecessary duplication of the curriculum. There was discussion on ways in which the college’s learning platform could be organised and exploited effectively. Some time was also spent discussing technical support, student services, SQA approval, timetabling, online support arrangements and other aspects of running the course that are likely to be affected using a new model of delivery.

At Langside College there were a number of weeks between the face to face sessions. The group’s second session was focused on eAssessment as this was agreed to be a common area of interest to the course team and an area where it was felt that some common methodologies could be implemented. The topic of eAssessment was explored with a focus on the range and scope of existing initiatives in Scotland, hardware & software possibilities, the existing VLE used in the college (BlackBoard) and the infrastructure in place to support local use and included a section on question design.

John Wheatley College

The proposal at John Wheatley College involved staff teaching core skills across the college curriculum rather than limiting the project to a particular course. It was felt that common approaches to the delivery of core skills, particularly communications would be beneficial for learners and enable new technologies to be exploited and innovative approaches to be mainstreamed.

Objectives of sessions

- To ensure that the benefits and possibilities of using ICT are clear to all.
- To establish the technologies (both hardware & software) that are available for course teams to use, and include hands on experience of using those considered could be most valuable for the core skills curriculum.
- To determine common teaching and assessment strategies involving a more consistent use of technology across the course.
- To ensure that accessibility issues are addressed at all stages.
- To agree tasks and timelines.
- To agree the processes which have to be completed to enable the strategy to be implemented.

A programme for the group was put together which included the exploration of hardware & software available, revisiting NLN & LTScotland core skills resources and new ways of organising them and accessing them online, an overview of Web 2.0 social software and their use for learning & teaching and handling digital images. Of particular interest for the core skills team was the use of Blogs, WIKIs and handling digital images.

Evaluation

It was universally agreed that the project had provided real benefits for each of the institutions involved in the pilot phase albeit not necessarily in the intended manner. The initial expectations of the Collaborative Course Design project to support small but significant change in course design and create a more coherent learning experience for learners were not met as envisaged. Feedback from coordinators in the pilot colleges suggests that steady growth in terms of ICT developments and deployment is a more likely scenario rather than any paradigm shift resulting from initiatives such as CCD. In addition and unsurprisingly it was noted that time pressures associated with the day to day operations leaves little time for reflection and creativity to flourish. All the pilot projects and the individuals involved however were extremely positive about the experience.

Involvement in the project meant that staff developed a greater understanding of how new technologies can be applied to learning and teaching. An introduction, particularly to web based social software, opened up the range of possibilities for using ICT for learning and teaching to staff and they were quick to relate their use to their own teaching practice. As with most course teams, the skills levels of staff in the pilot projects were variable and the opportunity to explore and get to grips with new technologies during the intensive training days meant that any fear factor some staff might have had was overcome. Feedback from Cardonald College described as the project as inspiring, sparking interest and providing staff with the confidence to develop online materials and activities. Staff skills were enhanced across the board and additional training needs were able to be identified.

Feedback from coordinators indicated that all staff had benefitted from their involvement in the project and a number of specific objectives had been met. Although it was felt that some aspects of using ICT might be more suited to higher level courses, the project at Langside has resulted in a more detailed review of the unit descriptors for the NC in Advanced Technology Studies and there has been a reduction in overlap in a couple of areas. The opportunity for staff to get together to discuss the nuts and bolts of the course and its delivery should not be underestimated. The course team developed strategies for more integration of assessment, project based assessment and are thinking more creatively about assessment methods. The

method of using a question template in conjunction with Respondus™ software has been adopted and the mechanism for creating e-Assessments in this way is being put in place. In addition it is planned that some social software will be introduced to the course in the New Year.