

update

NEWSLETTER

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Welcome

It has been a very productive time for Northumbria Learning since the last newsletter. We are launching a new plagiarism detection pilot with Edexcel, a new citation tool, piloting our new e-learning benchmarking tool, and have secured several high profile keynote speakers for the 2nd International Plagiarism Conference – supported by the JISC.

The debate about electronic plagiarism and copyright continues to remain a key topic in the media. I'm sure many of you have followed the unproven allegations made against Dan Brown's work, the suggestion that coursework on some GCSE's may be dropped in favour of exams, and more recently the high profile case of Dr Raj Persaud, who stepped down as host of Radio BBC 4's *All in the Mind* programme due to continuous allegations of plagiarism.

Current issues like these and academic views on plagiarism are debated on our open discussion forum which can be accessed via www.jiscpas.ac.uk. Recent discussions include; essay bank advertising on Amazon, the UK-wide survey commissioned by The Times Higher and the controversial statement made by Frank Furedi in The Guardian (28 March 2006), where he stated, 'Sadly universities

tend to accommodate rather than challenge the culture of cheating'. Log in and join the debate!

Within this edition of *Update*:

- Plagiarism experts Adrian Slater of Leeds University and Dr Fiona Duggan of the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service discuss the top plagiarism issues.
- City University provides a case study on their 'Plagiarism Awareness Week' held earlier this year.
- Updates on our Shibboleth, BlendXL and Moodle integration projects.
- An exclusive product review of a new study skills tool for citation and referencing 'Document It'.

Enclosed with this issue of Update is a four page conference special which details the confirmed keynote speakers, presenters and events including the first European Turnitin User Group.

I look forward to meeting you at the Plagiarism Conference on the 19-21 June.

Will Murray, CEO, Northumbria Learning



Edexcel tackles plagiarism with Turnitin

Northumbria Learning has been working with Edexcel for some time in the common interest of preserving the integrity of qualifications in both further and higher education in the UK.

Northumbria Learning will now work with Edexcel on a new plagiarism and prevention strategy, which will include the use of plagiarism detection software Turnitin, in the assessment of scripts submitted for GCSE, GCE and other suitable qualifications. The use of Turnitin will initially be limited to cases where plagiarism and cheating are suspected and will help Edexcel to deal more effectively and efficiently with these cases.

The Turnitin software will be used within Edexcel's Compliance and Quality Management Department for the analysis of work which has been submitted for moderation in May 2006. The software will support the existing work of the compliance team to investigate and assess individual cases of suspected malpractice.

The Turnitin software will help to speed up the investigative process, which currently relies on the moderator's knowledge of their subject, to identify instances of malpractice and plagiarism. After a script is submitted to the Turnitin software, a customised 'Originality' report will be produced. Results are based on exhaustive searches of billions of pages from both current and archived instances of the internet, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals.

The software will be applicable for work submitted across subjects, including other European languages.

Reports compiled by the Turnitin software will form part of the evidence base, which Edexcel builds up, before presenting its findings to the heads of the students' schools and colleges involved.

The use of Turnitin by the compliance team at Edexcel will really put the software to the test. Used by experts in their field, its effectiveness in identifying malpractice will be under close scrutiny.

At the end of the trial period, use of Turnitin by the compliance team will be reviewed, with the possibility of continued use.

Alan Read, Strategic Consultant at Edexcel said, 'The strategy will include the adaptation of assessment design to make assessment more resilient to plagiarism, and the use of detection services for internal qualification assessment and moderation. Use of detection services for BTEC verification, roll-out and adoption strategy, and design and implementation for all assessment centres will also be involved in the approach'.

John Black, Edexcel's Head of Compliance & Quality Management commented, "Edexcel is utilising technology in the assessment of candidate's work across our qualifications. We are keen to investigate how Turnitin can assist the detection of plagiarism, thereby underpinning the integrity of the examination system and maintaining standards. Additionally, this software will also benefit head teachers by providing detailed information and evidence, which they can use when discussing plagiarism with colleagues and candidates. We are determined to ensure that those who cheat are caught".

Did you know?

Over 60% of universities in the UK have adopted Northumbria Learning's Electronic Detection Service, which is powered by Turnitin.

JCQ plagiarism prevention pilot study

Awarding bodies are increasingly concerned about the academic integrity of coursework and plagiarism levels in submitted coursework. Plagiarism in the secondary and Further Education (FE) sector has received high profile coverage in the media in recent months. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) plagiarism prevention pilot study was set up to help volunteering colleges assess the issue of plagiarism in their establishment, and to gain a comprehensive overview of what is happening and what needs to be done to address the issue of plagiarism more effectively.

A number of FE colleges had already indicated that they were willing to take part in the pilot study when it was announced in September 2006. Since then, several other colleges have registered their interest in the scheme.

Six colleges are already working within the study, which will evaluate the use of detection software in the specific contexts of GCSE and A Level awards. The study will analyse the benefits for staff and students of incorporating detection software in an holistic approach to plagiarism in a FE setting. The pilot aims to cover a wide cross-section of courses and qualifications offered by different awarding bodies, with the focus being on English Literature and Business Studies.

Northumbria Learning has compiled a comprehensive questionnaire on plagiarism which students and staff will complete at the beginning and the end of the project to assess how their understanding, attitudes and perception towards plagiarism and plagiarism detection has been altered as a result of the trial.

The student questionnaire helps to assess student perceptions of what they consider to be plagiarism, and what levels they judge to be acceptable and unacceptable. The staff questionnaire will investigate teacher's understanding and awareness of the rules on plagiarism within their institutions, and asks for feedback on how they might inform their students about plagiarism and how they will prevent it in their individual teaching practice.

At the end of the project, each participating college will receive an individual report, and an overview report covering all the participating institutions will be submitted to the JCQ. The final report will assist the JCQ in identifying the best approach to the problem of plagiarism across the FE sector.

The project will work to improve awareness of the problem of plagiarism, advise staff on how to avoid plagiarism, and identify which measures to deter plagiarism will be most effective in different learning environments. Increasing students' awareness of citation rules is an important part of reducing the likelihood that plagiarism will occur, since it is the ignorance of these skills, which leads the majority of students to inadvertently plagiarise.

The study will provide a template for this approach, which will be applicable across the sector, evaluating the impact of the approach from the perspectives of both Examining Centres and Awarding Bodies and establishing benchmarks of practice for the sector as a whole.

Taking the complication out of citation

In this age of 'digital rights management' it is more important than ever to ensure that sources of information are correctly acknowledged. Although advances in technology have simplified the task of writing research papers, coursework and reports they have also provided the ability to copy and paste content from a range of sources without necessarily recording where the original work came from. If such inclusions remain unacknowledged or lost during revisions, it can create problems for students and staff alike who may find themselves accused of plagiarism because of sloppy documentation.

In many cases resources for teaching good citation techniques haven't kept pace with the rate at which online information sources are proliferating. Research, writing and citation skills need to be taught alongside the issues surrounding 'copy and paste' plagiarism to help students make best use of internet resources. 'Document it' is designed to help this process using just-in-time learning to specifically tackle the difficulties students have citing multiple sources and recording information about them.

By helping the student to record the correct information, following conventional citation standards, 'Document it' encourages students to learn how to create accurate and consistent citations.

'Document it' is a passive application that runs within Microsoft Word. Because it contains tips and notes which are available, as required, while the students work within their normal writing environment, learning happens without additional effort.

'Document it' prompts the user to enter the necessary information which is then laid out automatically on the page according to approved citation standards. The 'Document it' tool records each citation entered, so that students do not need to retype previously used citations, but can select them from a simple, scrolling list. The fully editable list allows for easy, uniform management of citations and references, no matter how comprehensive and lengthy the final document may become.

The user can flag which citations should be included in the bibliography and which should appear in the reference list. The software can arrange the correct citation formats for sources, from book chapters to websites as well as managing a generic citation format. When work is complete, a full citations list can be added to the document.

The help function in 'Document it' links to an online resource, which is constantly being kept up-to-date with answers to frequently asked questions. If a student is stuck they can post a question to the 'Document it' bulletin board.

A particularly useful feature of 'Document it', is the mobility of the software. Unlike most software packages, which need to be installed on individual workstations, deployment is simply a matter of distributing a document template. It requires no special knowledge, no installation process and, unlike other referencing tools, is always available within documents which use it. A student can take their work to any machine running Word and 'Document it' will appear automatically without installing anything on the new machine.

The software has been designed with students in mind and has been tested with teaching and learning focus groups made up of JISC PAS experts, students, librarians, researchers and tutors. It simplifies the process of learning good practice so that students can concentrate on the body of their arguments safe in the knowledge that their references and citations are appropriate.

'Document it' will be officially launched at the 2nd International Plagiarism Conference 2006, held 19-21 June, 2006. For further information please contact our sales team on + 44 (0) 191 243 8440 or email info@northumbrialearning.co.uk

'Document it' is part of a series of plagiarism prevention products provided by Northumbria Learning to help address the issues associated with correct acknowledgement, collusion and plagiarism.

This range currently includes:

- Document it: a learning system for recording and managing citations.
- Record it/Credit it: a form-based system which helps students to manually record references.
- Could you credit it: a best practice guide for research and crediting sources.
- Turnitin: an electronic plagiarism detection solution which enables academics to trace the heritage of a document by comparing it to billions of online pages of materials. Tutors can use this information to teach about correct citation in a formative mode and detect collusion and plagiarism in a summative mode.
- The JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service: at www.jiscpas.ac.uk provides free tip sheets and video guidance about the whole process of dealing with changing teaching and learning to help address plagiarism issues from institutional policy through to teaching students about correct acknowledgement.

Turnitin and moodle integration

iParadigms, the US developers of Turnitin, have already integrated Turnitin with Blackboard and WebCT Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). As hosting providers of Moodle and the European distributor of Turnitin, Northumbria Learning are working with iParadigms in the development of its integration with the increasingly popular Moodle environment.

Northumbria Learning offers hosted Moodle. Its simplicity, ease of use, numerous features and flexibility make it an excellent platform on which to build courses. Designed using sound pedagogical principles, it helps educators to create effective online learning communities.

This integration will make maintenance and updates much easier, allowing the user greater flexibility in how Turnitin is used in an online learning environment. This integration will allow members of the Moodle community to check work for originality using the prevention system, as part of their standard workflow, without having to leave the Moodle environment.

Instructors will be able to create classes, assignments and other activities within the familiar Moodle interface that will automatically flow into the Turnitin system.

Instructors and administrators will no longer need to maintain separate Moodle and Turnitin accounts, and because the Turnitin functions will be available through the Moodle interface, teachers and students who want to use Turnitin will not have to register separately.

An update on this development will be published in our autumn 2006 newsletter.



The low-down on Shibboleth

Many academic databases made available over the internet by publishers typically use an Athens authentication. For a number of years the JISC funded Athens service has put the UK ahead of the rest of the world in providing a consistent and uniform access mechanism to a wide range of different off-campus resources.

Whilst the UK has been using Athens, other countries have been developing their own solutions to the problem of accessing multiple resources with a single account authentication identity. Shibboleth, one of these solutions, has emerged as a front-runner for the most widely adopted standard and is already in use by several European countries and Australia.

The JISC's own investigation into the issue of user account authentication and middleware also points to Shibboleth as being the preferred technology partly because it solves the problems arising from a lack of a single sign on. Consequently, the JISC will replace the Athens system with Shibboleth in 2008.

Shibboleth differs from Athens in that it does not carry out the authentication itself – access to externally and internally produced resources becomes a one-step process, carried out via the registered institution, using local passwords issued by that institution.

The classic Athens system uses a separate identifier and password for remote resources. These may be difficult to remember alongside other

locally used usernames and passwords. The result is that these external passwords are either forgotten, reducing the amount of take-up of expensively acquired services, or written down, compromising security. Shibboleth relies on locally used identity credentials, which commonly provide access to personal information such as library holdings and email. Users therefore only need to recall their own individual password which is much more likely to be remembered and kept confidential.

Northumbria Learning is now working on setting up the Plagiarism Detection Service, TurnitinUK, as a Shibboleth enabled online application. This will enable institutions who are adopting TurnitinUK to use Shibboleth as an authentication mechanism.

It is Northumbria Learning's intention to have the service ready before the changeover to Shibboleth in 2008.

The benefits

- Staff and students will no longer be required to register en masse onto the external resource system. This should remove some of the workload on library staff who typically carry out this task, and who have problems with unsynchronised passwords.
- It should provide easier management of account credentials as they are managed locally at the institution.
- Staff and students only need to remember their local institution account credentials.

Why the name 'Shibboleth'?

Shibboleth is a word or pronunciation that distinguishes people of one group or class from those of another. The word comes from the Old Testament (Judges 12:1-6). The Ephraimites who lived to the west of the river Jordan invaded Gilead, on the other side of the river and were defeated. Retreating, their way was blocked by the Gileadites who controlled the fords. They had different accents and the Ephraimites pronounced the 'sh' sound as 'si'. To separate friend from foe, those crossing the river were asked by the Gileadites to pronounce the word 'shibboleth' (it means an ear of corn). According to the bible, the 42,000 who pronounced it 'sibboleth' were killed (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

Reference

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th edn. (2000) Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

New legal matters

In each issue of *Update*, we welcome Adrian Slater, in-house solicitor from the University of Leeds, who will provide insights into topical legal issues related to plagiarism. Adrian has worked for the University of Leeds for 9 years and is responsible for drafting their plagiarism codes of conduct as well as being involved in their plagiarism appeals and processes, lecturing on topics related to plagiarism and has guest lectured at other institutions in the UK on plagiarism related topics.

'It's not what you say but the way that you do it'

By Adrian Slater, the University of Leeds

Plagiarism has created an industry of uncertainty. One of the most fundamental concepts that is often overlooked is whether decisions on plagiarism are a matter purely of academic judgement. This matters a lot. If it is, then it would seem, even if a decision is patently wrong, you may, on the substance of your judgement, be immune from legal action.

With regard to plagiarism in the case of *Clark v University of Lincolnshire and Humberside*, it was quite clearly stated that academic judgement was not something that could be questioned. The Courts seem to suggest that plagiarism, probably as a matter of academic judgement, is too complicated and too subjective for them to be involved. To many outsiders this seems something of a strange position. For example, if you look at the case involving Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and his alleged breach of copyright, very akin to plagiarism, clearly the Courts feel able to reach judgements based upon sophisticated issues with regard to the ownership of the expression of ideas. What makes plagiarism in the academic arena so different? Why isn't it treated in the same way as breach of copyright? Why isn't it treated as an issue of conduct in the same way as we would treat someone conducting 'bent' science? I don't think the differences have been properly explained.

Immunity from legal action is not entirely unique to the academic world and academic judgements. For example, in the recent case of

Professor Sir Roy Meadow the Court of Appeal felt it appropriate to support Sir Meadow's immunity from civil proceedings and related action by the GMC to have him struck off where he was acting as an expert witness.

Even if a decision on plagiarism is an issue of academic judgement and not judicable – that does not mean we are by any means in the clear. You can get your decision 'right' on whether or not someone did commit plagiarism, but if you get your process wrong you can still be subject to an adverse finding by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and the Courts under judicial review. In fact, process seems to be the most problematic area for universities from my experience. Universities tend to be very good at determining whether plagiarism has occurred. Not surprisingly academic staff bring to such a debate an enormous amount of experience and intellectual rigour. Where I think universities are much weaker are on following their own processes and making sure that those processes follow basic principles of natural justice and are Human Rights Act compliant.

By way of example, take two common situations that are often problematic. Firstly, a tutor talks to a student informally with an implicit or explicit understanding that the conversation has been held 'in confidence', a 'bit of a chat'. The student assumes their right of privacy is being respected. If from the talk it becomes apparent that a student has plagiarised, how can the academic break the commitment of confidentiality? Does this mean that you have to be clear to all your students that certain topics are never 'in confidence' and if that is the case what is on the list and how do you communicate

this? The only clear way forward is to say to students that they can never assume confidentiality. Alternatively, at the beginning of the talk if you know of the dangerous territory coming up warn the student. This of course will have an effect upon the relationship and may damage pastoral care. Is this a case of the tail wagging the dog?

Secondly, at department level students are often subject to informal action where protection of natural justice rights usually will not have been fully observed. None the less, where action is taken, e.g. by way of reprimand or change in assessment, such action is typically recorded on the student file. What happens when references are required? If you are going to write a reference there is a legal obligation to write a fair and reasonable one. How can you then omit referring to such past conduct where under the reference integrity and competency are an issue? Should you not be warning students on how action recorded is likely to be used? There could even be an issue under the Data Protection Act with regard to 'fair processing'. Only with the information can the student make rational choices about invoking more formal procedures, including a right of appeal. I would advise my university that where matters are placed on a student file – and may be considered later in a reference or otherwise – students should be at least made aware of that.

Questions?

Do you have a question that you would like Adrian to address in the next issue of *Update*? If so, email it to info@northumbrialearning.co.uk, along with your contact information.

All about plagiarism

Why do students plagiarise?

By Dr Fiona Duggan, JISC-PAS

Understanding the reasons why students might plagiarise is the first step in developing effective strategies to reduce the incidence of plagiarism. Inevitably, attitudes that lead to plagiarism impact upon other aspects of student behaviour so addressing these issues should also reap benefits in other areas. The two most common reasons provided by students for plagiarism are ignorance and lack of time.

■ **Ignorance.** Many students are unclear about the precise nature of the activity known as plagiarism, with the result that they are liable to plagiarise in their assessed work without realising that they have done so. It is, therefore, vital that institutions ensure that students are given appropriate and frequent instruction on the need for and mechanics of accurate citation from the outset, to reduce the likelihood of inadvertent plagiarism.

■ **Lack of time.** Where students leave the production of work to the last minute, there can be a temptation to take shortcuts, such as cutting and pasting text from websites without attribution to compensate for the lack of preparation. 'Bunching' of assessments can also cause problems for even relatively organised students. Where assessments are designed to assess both the process as well as a final product, the temptation, and indeed the opportunity, to take short cuts can be reduced.

Other reasons that students give for plagiarising include:

■ **Improving marks.** Students who do not have confidence in their own abilities can sometimes see plagiarism as a way of improving their work and therefore, their marks. In addition, students may feel under pressure, either internally or externally, to achieve consistently high marks and may see plagiarism as a means to achieve this. Improving detection methods, including the routine use of detection software, can increase the risks associated with plagiarising for these students and make the possibility of discovery not worth the risk.

■ **'Irrelevant' courses.** Students who perceived that a module was not directly relevant to their eventual qualification or employment prospects can be tempted to expend as little effort as possible on assignments set for that module. In this context, plagiarism can be seen as a mechanism for producing the required work with the least amount of effort.



■ **'Disinterested' lecturers.** Students who perceived that their lecturers' course material was out-of-date or unchanged for years; assignment tasks that have been used in their entirety for previous student cohorts, and lectures that suggest their own engagement with the subject is minimal justify plagiarism as mirroring the effort expended by the lecturer.

■ **Beating the system.** Whatever the system in place, a small number of students will attempt to 'beat the system'. Using detection software as an educational tool rather than a punitive measure, and impressing upon students that any detection software is part of a wider approach to the issue, should help to reduce these incidences of plagiarism.

(The reasons given above are based on the 2001 report, *Plagiarism detection & prevention; final report on the JISC Electronic Plagiarism Detection Project* by Gill Chester for the JISC.)

Plagiarism awareness week

Held at City University

In January 2006, City University hosted its inaugural Plagiarism Awareness Week. The main objective of the week was to raise awareness of plagiarism by providing a series of sessions and workshops for staff and students of the University.

This was a successful event which covered a wide range of issues and attracted good publicity. It was recognised that: plagiarism now represents a major challenge for staff in higher education institutions - particularly in view of the availability of information on the internet; and that it will be a challenge to encourage people to take an interest in plagiarism issues. Organisers at City University had to work hard to ensure that events were well attended. If colleagues at other universities organise any similar events City University's advice would be to ensure that students and staff are made aware of plagiarism's importance - and the obvious benefits of attending.

The event was launched with a talk by Professor Laurie Taylor, best known for his Radio 4 programmes and his column for The Times Higher Education Supplement. Later in the week, Jude Carroll, based at Oxford Brookes University and well published in plagiarism issues, provided two lively sessions for staff covering prevention, detection and 'dealing with' plagiarism, whilst Gill Rowell, visiting from the JISC Plagiarism Advisory Service (PAS), provided workshops about plagiarism detection software TurnitinUK. Further sessions and events were hosted by university staff, addressing related issues such as 'designing out' plagiarism through assessment, and good referencing practices.

Staff at the City University intend to build on Plagiarism Awareness Week with several initiatives being taken forward, e.g. enhanced web services being developed over a period of time. Like the event itself, initiatives will cover all the key issues in plagiarism, including: definitions and 'types'; updated information on University policy; suggestions for plagiarism prevention; sources of further help; and a resources section. In addition, plagiarism awareness will be more fully incorporated into Information Literacy programmes (provided by the Library and Information Services, at the University), programme handbooks, student evaluation forms and annual programme evaluations. Finally, an important step under consideration is the appointment of an Academic Practice Coordinator or Academic Misconduct Officer in each School of the University.

You can contact staff involved in the organisation of City University's Plagiarism Awareness Week by emailing Emma Boylan, Assistant Registrar (Learning & Teaching) on e.boylan@city.ac.uk

e-learning audit tool

e-learning is a delivery mechanism designed to meet the changing and growing demands of learners, today and tomorrow. Key factors making e-learning an attractive delivery solution include the ease of access to content, the ability for users to study at their own pace and being able to access content and information anytime and anywhere.

The e-learning audit tool from Northumbria Learning is designed to help individual schools and universities to measure learning in progress against the strategies set out in the DFES e-learning strategy, 'Harnessing Technology - Transforming Learning and Children's Services', published in March 2005 and the HEFCE strategy for e-learning, published in March 2005.

The audit tool will help institutions to assess their current state of e-learning and IT use. The tool will also demonstrate how much has been achieved and help identify what areas need to be addressed.

The tool itself is straight forward to use, setting out the strands and priorities which institutions must address to implement an effective e-learning strategy. Institutions can assess how they stand in relation to the aims through a process of self-assessment. Explanatory notes are provided which help to identify factors that might support responses to individual statements.

The second part of the audit tool assists users in identifying how to proceed from existing positions to where they aspire to be.

The tool is a straightforward way of assessing the often complicated IT infrastructure in place at an institution and advises on how participation can be widened. This will have various benefits for staff development and increasing off-campus access to online facilities.

Northumbria Learning, in collaboration with Northumbria University, is currently developing questionnaires for both students and staff to help assess the perspectives and perceptions of where an institution sits in terms of e-learning.

Northumbria Learning will be launching the e-learning audit tool to institutions this summer.

'The future's now' at the SCONUL Conference 21-23 June 2006

Copthorne Hotel, Newcastle upon Tyne

It is expected that over 150 directors of university, college and national library and information services from the UK and Ireland will descend upon Newcastle in June to raise debate and influence planning for the future of libraries and their role in supporting learning, research and scholarship in an ever more mobile, accessible and information rich world. The Society of College, National and University Librarians (SCONUL) Conference is returning to Newcastle after 16 years and will be hosted by the Universities of Northumbria, Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham and Teesside.

The programme draws together national and international speakers who will challenge and inspire the audience to consider innovative, visionary and influential research and practice in library development and educational management. Keynote speakers include: Eugenie Prime (former Manager of Corporate Libraries, Hewlett-Packard Company and first recipient of the Dow Jones Leadership Award for 21st Century librarianship), Mike Keller (University Librarian, Stanford University), David Baker (Principal, College of St Mark and St John), Les Watson (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Glasgow Caledonian University), Liz Lyon (Director of UKOLN) and Peter Knight (Vice-Chancellor, University of Central England, Birmingham).

Workshops will underpin the plenaries and the social programme will highlight the very best in Newcastle. Professor Kel Fidler, Vice-Chancellor of Northumbria University, will open the conference and welcome delegates.

SCONUL provides a single lobbying voice for its diverse membership and works with national initiatives and policy development advising both government agencies and other bodies on policy and sectoral priorities.

The conference programme is available at http://www.sconul.ac.uk/event_conf/agm2006/prog.html

For further information or to discuss sponsorship please contact Professor Jane Core, Director of Library and Learning Services, University of Northumbria on + 44 (0) 191 227 4126 or by emailing jane.core@northumbria.ac.uk

northumbrialearning DIGITAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Northumbria Learning offers a range of services in all areas of e-learning and Plagiarism:

- Plagiarism Advice and Consultancy
- Electronic Detection Service
- e-learning Advice and Consultancy
- Hosted e-learning Solutions
- Citation and Referencing Tools and Publications.

Please note that we have moved offices. Our new contact details are:

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The rocky road to success

11th Annual Technology in Education International Conference and Tech Exposition,

'Sharing the vision' 26-29 March 2006

Malcolm Bell, Academic Advisor at Northumbria Learning held a session at this Conference entitled 'The rocky road to success: the challenge of MLE implementation', exploring the softer side of technology.

Malcolm presented Northumbria Learning's experience of implementing a Managed Learning Environment (MLE). He explored models of innovation, cultural change and staff development in the implementation of the Blackboard MLE at Northumbria University. This has led to the current situation where the University has over a 90% take-up by academic staff. He identified issues and barriers encountered along the way and compared these with the experiences of the conference participants.

Key points to have emerged included:

- Breaking down the ICT interference factor allows focus to shift from technical to pedagogical issues. Once staff are familiar with the technology, the focus can shift to exploring how best to deploy it to the benefit of the learning and teaching situation.
- Staff development for e-learning must not be viewed in isolation from other aspects of ICT and non-ICT staff development.
- Staff development for e-learning is most effective when driven by the real needs of preparing a coherent, web-based learning environment (Collis & Moonen, 2001).

- To engage fully with the pedagogical issues, the collaborative involvement of whole programme teams, both academic and administrative, is greatly beneficial.
- A range of approaches is essential. This involves looking at the different ways staff prefer to learn and catering for these.
- The emergence of leaders with vision is extremely helpful. These staff are at the forefront of developing the use of the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment within their own teaching situation and are able to share their expertise with colleagues.

However, innovations rarely run entirely smoothly and a number of problems and issues arose during implementation of the MLE.

Including:

Data integration and quality • Learner access • Integration of staff development • The need to develop a road map which highlighted approaches to policies for: IT, internal quality assurance, copyright and IPR, data protection, legalities and plagiarism • Problems resulting from upgrades • Strategic planning for sustaining the development • Culture change amongst stakeholders and organisations.

As a result of the implementation at Northumbria University, it is hopeful that the lessons learnt will help to facilitate successful implementation and adoption of future innovations.

Reference

Collis, B. & Moonen, J. (2001) *Flexible learning in a digital world: experiences and expectations*. London: Kogan Page.

Plagiarism survey tools

As part of Northumbria Learning's work to help institutions develop an effective plagiarism strategy, in-house experts have created plagiarism survey tools. These will help assess current policies and procedures and the perceptions of plagiarism held by those within an institution, in order to help improve academic and institutional practices.

In the form of two anonymous, online questionnaires, the plagiarism survey tools give an opportunity for both students and staff to voice their opinions, allowing the institution to build up a realistic picture of current academic practice, attitudes towards and perceptions of plagiarism and academic integrity. The questionnaires are designed to identify the key issues and elicit specific responses to clearly defined questions, as well as providing the opportunity for expanded answers.

The plagiarism survey tools are currently being used as part of the trial with the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) in the Further Education sector, as well as at two other 'case study' Higher Education institutions. Once the responses to the questionnaires have been collated, experts at Northumbria Learning will use the responses to extract information on existing practices and identify problem areas which need to be addressed further. The results of the surveys will also highlight good practice where institutions have been particularly effective in dealing with academic misconduct.

The staff questionnaire allows academics to record their own individual experience of and encounters with plagiarism in the last academic year, and their own practice in preventing plagiarism. The questionnaire also seeks to consider the guidance provided by the institution in preventing and detecting plagiarism, and how this informs staff practice.

Input from SU representatives at Northumbria University ensures that the student questionnaire will give learners a unique opportunity to express their opinions on plagiarism and academic integrity. The student survey will identify which activities students believe to be academic misconduct and where the rules and regulations of academic misconduct are defined for them. Students will be asked to consider whether the guidance given to them has been adequate for their needs. Responses to the survey will also help assess students' awareness of actions taken by lecturers and their institution to detect plagiarism, and their attitudes towards electronic detection tools.

At the end of the case studies, initial use of the plagiarism survey tools will be evaluated before being made available this summer for wider use by Further and Higher Education institutions.

Blended learning with extra large groups

In our last newsletter, Northumbria Learning announced the successful bid to receive Minerva funding to take part in Blend XL. Blend XL is a 3-year project, which will look at blended learning with student cohorts (over 100). Blended learning can broadly be defined as 'learning which is partially mediated via technology'.

Already, Northumbria Learning, in collaboration with Northumbria University, has made significant progress with the project. A new website was launched in April to provide a wide variety of information on the project including a public area, a subscription area and a partner's workspace.

Northumbria Learning and Northumbria University lead on two key project areas, the inventory of existing practices and dissemination. In addition, Northumbria Learning will support Northumbria University staff in the development of a case study.

Each partner in Blend XL will bring a case into the project and will use an action research methodology to create a blended learning setting for their large group of students. A model for blended learning with large student groups will then be developed based upon their experiences and outcomes.

The case study and action research are being undertaken in conjunction with the School of Health Community and Education Studies (HCES) at Northumbria. This involves developing the Study Skills Module, which is a core element on the BA Joint Honours Programme. The course is currently taught face-to-face and, over the 2 years, will be refashioned into a blended learning module.

Northumbria Learning and Northumbria University have worked on assessment of the current state of blending learning across Europe. A questionnaire, distributed to participating institutions was designed to address a number of areas and to identify key factors which impacted upon the blended learning situation. The survey looked at all aspects of the role of e-learning – structured vs unstructured, group versus individual, online versus offline and teacher directed versus student directed.

The outcome of the Blend XL project will comprise five blended courses, an educational design model, scenarios and cases from educational practice and a toolkit with existing usable software. A virtual centre of expertise and publications will also be produced, as well as a digital handbook for teachers.

For more information on Blend XL, please visit www.blend-xl.org