



Leadership and elearning

CEL's role in promoting the transformative effect of elearning and technology in the learning and skills sector

An overview of the investigation

In its e-strategy, *Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services*, published in March 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) sets out its approach to embracing the use of digital technology in education. Amongst the priorities identified specifically for the post-16 sector are:

- ensuring that leaders are equipped to lead the adoption and effective use of ICT
- supporting leadership collaboration on the strategic role of elearning
- ensuring that work-based learning (WBL) and adult and community learning (ACL) are not disadvantaged by comparison with institution-based learning

In December 2003, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) commissioned an investigation into its role in promoting the transformative effect of elearning and technology in the learning and skills sector. The investigation comprised four stages:

- stage 1: assessment of the developments to date
- stage 2: evaluation of current initiatives in the learning and skills sector
- stage 3: exploration of the status of adult and community learning (ACL) and work-based learning (WBL) providers regarding the development of elearning strategies
- stage 4: recommendations and outline specifications

An interim report (April 2004) provides the findings for stages 1, 2 and 3 and is available to download from CEL's website at www.centreforexcellence.org.uk. The final report will be available by December 2005.

At the time of the interim report, "elearning and technology" was known as "ILT" (information and learning technologies), so this is how it is referred to in the following summary. An explanation of terms appears overleaf.

This document provides a summary of the investigation and findings, highlighting some of the key outcomes and recommendations.

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The research report was commissioned by CEL and carried out by LSDA and Lancaster University Management School from December 2003.

Review of developments to date



Glossary of acronyms

ACL	Adult and community learning
Becta	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
CMS	Content management system
CoVE	Centres of Vocational Excellence
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
FE	Further education
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
LEA	Local education authority
LMS	Learning management system
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NLN	National Learning Network
SLICT	Strategic leadership in information communication technology
VLE	Virtual learning environment
WBL	Work-based learning

Overview

Stage 1 reviewed current and recent ILT activity within the sector and assessed the role that CEL could and should play in promoting the transformative effect of ILT. It looked at the place of strategic leadership in effecting such transformation and the implications for leadership development. Six areas were chosen for examination:

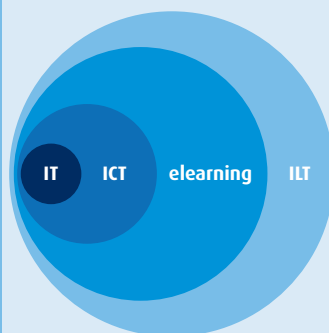
- recent DfES papers, including *Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services*, 2005
- review of other papers, projects and relevant materials from partners in post-16 learning
- overview of the LSC and Becta provision for schools — SLICT programme
- review of the consultation on *Towards a unified elearning strategy*, DfES 2003
- dialogue with the NLN staff development working group on their view of leadership in the technological context
- dialogue with the CoVE programme

Recommendations

In summary, the following recommendations emerged from stage 1 of the investigation:

- keep in touch with and inform government policy
- formalise strategic links with the post-16 elearning partners, such as DfES, LSC, Becta, JISC, LSDA and NIACE
- develop a scenario planning approach and strategic analysis and choice approach to initiatives — “why ILT?”
- promote the strategic implementation tools as a universal “language”
- develop leadership initiatives that recognise differing stages of infrastructure development, specific issues that differentiate colleges, ACL and WBL, and the need to encourage IT literacy
- demonstrate excellence in the use of ILT to enhance the journey of learners on leadership programmes

The vocabulary used to describe the use of technology in the sector is still evolving. Our report uses the following definitions, based on the eclipse diagram by Markos Tiris, LSDA, 1999.



IT	Information technology	The computer infrastructure, hardware and software used to process data and deliver information.
ICT	Information and communication technologies	The combination of computing and communication technologies (including computer networks and telephone systems) that connects and enables some of today's most exciting systems e.g. the internet.
elearning	Electronic learning	Elearning is learning supported or enhanced through the application of information and communications technology.
ILT*	Information and learning technologies *	This was used, in further education colleges, to refer to the use of information and communication technologies to support the core business of colleges: the delivery and management of learning. * The current term is elearning and technology.



“Nothing really happens unless if you have leadership. You can have as many champions as you like, you can have as much online information as you like, you can have brilliant pieces of learning technology ... but it begins and ends with leadership.”

Diana Laurillard, Head of Elearning Strategy, DfES

Evaluation of current initiatives in the sector

Introduction

Stage 2 involved evaluating a programme commissioned by NLN in 2002 to focus on the role of senior management in developing a strategic approach to ILT within the college's plan.

Senior management teams from eight colleges participated in the first phase (2002-3), and from another eight in the second phase (2003-4). The questionnaire asked participants to compare perceptions at the start and after the programme.

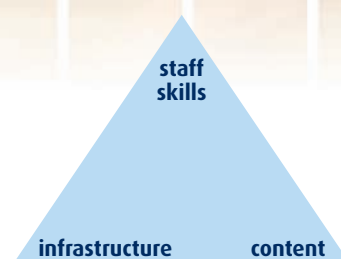
Findings

- Culture, awareness, communication and commitment
 - The approach to ILT development needs to be congruent with organisational culture.
 - Providers need to accept that there will be mistakes and that they may need to backtrack on given projects.
 - Senior staff need to recognise that their view of progress is not necessarily shared by front line staff.
- Achievements and resources
 - The vision may be clear but forward progress can be hampered by IT-related setbacks and/or other priorities claiming strategic and/or operational resources.
 - There are a number of issues relating to the technical knowledge and competence of specialist staff, including a shortage of people with a combination of strong technical ability and good communication skills. These problems are compounded by general high employment and relatively low rates of pay in the sector.
 - Measuring the impact of ILT progress is difficult, especially soon after a strategic development programme.
- Professional development
 - Professional development is critical to successful implementation. It needs to be relevant in content and of a style and a level which are appropriate to the organisational culture and context.
 - To be effective, professional development initiatives need to take account of the organisation's level of awareness and stage of development.
 - The mutual benefits of partnership development initiatives are improved if partners are at a similar stage with respect to ILT development.
 - More sharing of effective practice would be valuable, especially opportunities to observe the potential of ILT being demonstrated in real situations.

Recommendations

... for providers

- Developing a "whole-organisation" perspective is important and "buy-in", development and support by the senior management team is crucial to success in embedding the ILT strategy in the curriculum.
- Development needs to be balanced so that there is progress in all aspects of the ILT triangle:



- Providers should identify the areas where ILT will be most effectively embedded and use these to exemplify best practice then to be rolled out cross-college.
- ILT champions must have explicit SMT support.
- Appropriate staff should receive effective training and support.
- Audits, evaluation, controls and other key performance indicators should be devised and implemented to measure progress and success.

... for CEL

- Research into the effectiveness of ILT in teaching and learning in FE is sparse. The case for 'Why ILT?' needs to be made more explicit and be backed up with evidence.
- Cross-sector networking needs to be developed — there are lessons to be learnt from the primary sector.
- The crucial importance of inter-college dissemination of best practice needs more recognition and facilitation.
- Research is needed into the effects of ILT on teaching and learning, with results disseminated to the sector.
- Further research is needed into the nature of the barriers to progress encountered as ILT strategies are developed and implemented.

"Good teaching and learning practice must involve elearning. As a leader, you've got to have vision, you've got to facilitate elearning and you've got to recognise that it's a long-term investment that you can't outsource. A key aspect of students being able to learn independently is their ability to access IT-based tools, equipment and learning materials."

Frank McLoughlin, Principal, City and Islington College

ILT strategies in work-based learning

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to:

- explore the status of WBL providers regarding the development of ILT strategies
- conduct a small-scale investigation with a sample of providers in WBL to ascertain whether such organisations are developing ILT strategies
- assess how effectively they are using ILT
- establish what support they need in order to develop more strategic leadership of ILT
- provide recommendations for CEL on the specific training requirements for strategic development of ILT in the WBL sector and indicate whether such development is best included as part of CEL core programmes or developed separately

The research was undertaken in five distinct steps:

- research and analysis of evaluations and reports
- development of a sampling plan comprising 40 questionnaires, 20 telephone interviews and 5 organisation visits, across a range of provider types and locations
- questionnaire development and distribution
- fieldwork involving site visits and phone interviews
- analysis of the findings

Findings

From the 70 per cent of questionnaires returned and the detailed telephone interviews and visits, CEL found that:

- there was a significant variance in the understanding of what was meant by the term “ILT” and its potential value. Lack of priority placed on ILT meant that it was difficult to get access to strategic decision-makers to capture fully the status of “strategic leadership across the WBL sector”
- larger organisations had been more proactive, whereas smaller providers were still working on “purchasing computers and software”
- funding was seen as a major barrier:

“The company has no intention to develop a formal ILT strategy as we do not have the capacity to fund this; besides, this is not included in our business objectives for this year.”

Comment from WBL provider

Does your organisation have an ILT strategy?



- No ILT strategy (78%)
- Developing an ILT strategy (14%)
- ILT strategy already in place (8%)

Recommendations

- CEL should provide training and development programmes for leaders and managers on strategic ILT development, working with other supporting bodies.

“CEL has the ability and expertise to manage the training, that is customised to organisations’ specific needs ... CEL could also work with providers to develop their ILT strategies.”

Comment from WBL provider

- Early priority should be given to designing a development programme suitable for both tiers of management.
- The perceived need for training and development is significant, and some providers are willing to fund their participation. Subsidies could alleviate funding concerns.
- As in the college sector, there are many examples of effective ILT practice, but as there is an absence of strategic leadership and management, this should be the focus of any initiatives.
- Follow-up elearning, mentoring and coaching activity allows managers to improve their skills, knowledge and confidence, and provision for it should be included.
- Ways of sharing effective practice need to be considered in the programme design, including networks, websites and showcasing.

“Our VLE enables students to access their learning wherever they are and gives them the opportunity to progress at their own speed. They get to practice what they’ve experienced in the classroom and expand on it, and by the way, our older learners engage with technology just as well as the younger students do.”

Angela Hunt, e-Resources Manager, Lewisham College

ILT strategies in adult and community learning

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to:

- explore the status of ACL providers regarding the development of ILT strategies
- conduct a small-scale investigation with a sample of providers in ACL to ascertain whether such organisations are developing ILT strategies
- assess how effectively they are using ILT
- establish what support they need in order to develop more strategic leadership of ILT
- provide recommendations for CEL on the specific training requirements for strategic development of ILT in the ACL sector and indicate whether such development is best included as part of CEL core programmes or developed separately

The research was undertaken in five distinct steps:

- research and analysis of evaluations and reports
- development of a sampling plan comprising 40 questionnaires, 20 telephone interviews and 5 organisation visits, across a range of provider types and locations
- questionnaire development and distribution
- fieldwork involving site visits and phone interviews
- analysis of the findings

Findings

From the 50 per cent of questionnaires returned and the detailed telephone interviews and visits, CEL found that:

- thirty per cent had a formal ILT strategy in place, ten per cent did not, and sixty per cent had one in preparation
- some LEA-funded providers had only just started to draft ILT strategy documents, to meet NIACE deadlines
- in the absence of an ILT strategy, developments have been carried through staff training and development, MIS and quality development programmes. Responses included phrases such as “ad hoc to meet immediate needs”, “piecemeal and uncoordinated”, and “keen individuals”
- opinion varied widely as to which level of management should receive priority for development. Some who chose senior managers suggested that ILT is a development priority and needs to be led from the top,

with conviction and authority, but that senior managers do not understand the issues and do not engage fully with the ILT agenda

- those who chose middle managers claimed that they were responsible for quality and management of tutors, and were therefore in the best position to interpret strategies and effect change.

Is there a need for development on ILT for leaders and managers?



- perhaps the strongest theme to emerge was the need for more time — time for individuals to absorb and consider new ideas, to investigate what is available to them, and to develop applications of the ideas to their own situations.

Recommendations

- CEL’s roles and relationships must be clear and specific; it needs to establish credibility with the ACL sector and ensure that its offerings are not based on incorrect assumptions about the nature of ACL services.
- CEL should be knowledgeable about existing provision and ensure that any new provision should build upon it.
- CEL should be realistic and sensitive about the timing of any support offered.
- The need for basic ICT skills should be addressed. Whilst straightforward skills training is suitable for some, it may be inappropriate for senior managers and delivery of one-to-one support should be considered.
- The e-leadership and elearning standards (Fento 2001/ LLUK 2005) provide a structure for the task facing ACL providers and should be used as a framework.

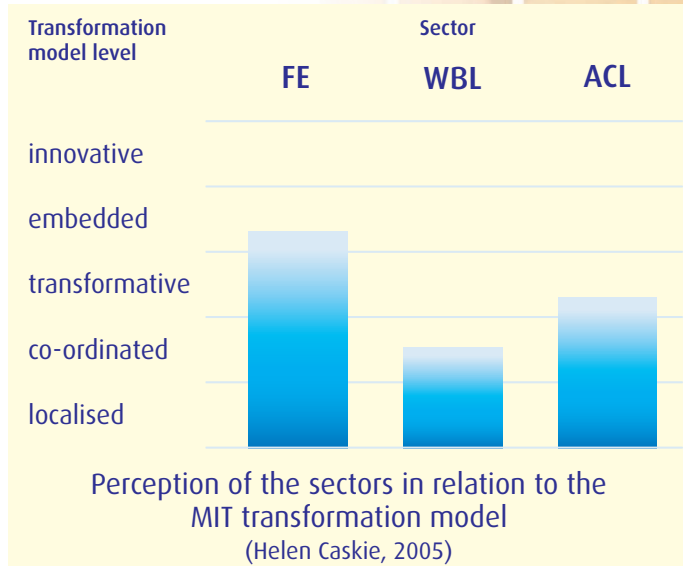


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Outcomes and plans

A model for the sector

The key outcome of the research was the adaptation of the MIT model to understand the broad stages of development in the learning and skills sector.



- Promote an e-approach to continuing professional development of leaders, investigating and reporting on the alignment of CEL's e-portfolio with national work being done by Becta and JISC, developing e-induction and elearning materials.



Centre for Excellence in Leadership

CEL was launched in October 2003 to focus on leadership and management development and support colleges and learning providers in boosting skills development, improving learning and developing more flexible organisations. CEL is a partnership led by Lancaster University Management School and LSDA, with the support of Ashridge Business School.

Recommendations

CEL is engaging in a range of key activities to help the sector move forward. The recommendations are that it should:

- role model the use of elearning and technology
- integrate elearning and technology as a strategic issue into all programmes
- provide specific programmes of support to leaders on elearning as a strategic issue

The recommendations should be seen in the context of CEL's overall mission, aim 6 in its strategic plan:

To improve leadership understanding and skills to utilise the transformative potential of elearning.

Activities

- Develop a pilot elearning infrastructure, including set up of test beds for different VLEs, LMSs and CMSs, testing open source products, building a prototype portal, investigating the feasibility of linking it to other sector providers and developing functional specifications.

- Integrate elearning as a strategic issue within CEL through staff development, conducting a robust training needs analysis, designing, developing and delivering training programmes and disseminating extracts of briefing papers to the sector.
- Implement a unified, effective elearning strategy for CEL, keeping abreast of government policy, contributing to the DfES strategy and collaborating with post-16 partners.
- Provide leadership development in strategic elearning, developing specific programmes for FE senior management teams and change agents, and for WBL providers, and working with NIACE on delivery of programmes for ACL providers.

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