

Executive Summary

Aims and Objectives

The CAMEL Tangible Benefits of e-Learning project aimed to collate and share the tangible and real benefits to staff, learners and institutions of e-learning, through a discipline and academic department focus by using the CAMEL model devised by JISC infoNet and ALT (see Background). Its objectives were to produce: up to 16 institutional case studies, with a subject discipline focus, which identify tangible benefits of e-learning; and report on the CAMEL workshops and evaluation of the process, which aimed to identify any real or perceived weaknesses or threats of e-learning..

Approach

The approach taken was to: agree a template for the case studies and set up a wiki so that participants could collaborate online; hold a series of 24-hour workshops during which participants would question, challenge and reflect on each others' practice; continue the exchanges online to finalise the case studies; and synthesise the outcomes for JISC and the wider community.

Outputs

The final outputs are 37 case studies from 16 institutions, so the project has exceeded its original case study target. The case studies are currently available for viewing on a password-protected wiki. The case studies incorporate a rich selection of media including graphics, video and simulation games. Appendix 1 of the report contains summaries of all of the case studies in the form of a 'cover sheet' that outlines the piece of work undertaken and indicates what types of tangible benefits are shown in the study under a list of headings agreed by the project participants, including: effect on learning (e.g. context, style, insight and reflective practice); effect on exam results; effect on resources (e.g. effect on cost of delivery, time, applying full economic costing to teaching and learning); and others.

Findings and Conclusions

Participants commented that the project had altered their perception of the tangible benefits of e-learning and made them consider both the quantitative and qualitative aspects as well as the varying perspectives on benefits according to different stakeholder viewpoints. Whilst the project participants gained most value from the process of critical reflection itself, they also valued the end products, i.e. the actual case studies. Participants identified the cross-disciplinary interaction as one of the most useful elements of the project.

Participants have indicated they will make use of the case studies in future. Participants also endorsed the CAMEL model as one that fits well with the academic culture and people felt they learned more from this type of critiquing and informal networking than from many formal staff development activities. However, there was a general feeling that the timescales were too tight to gain the full potential value from the CAMEL exchange approach.

The subject areas sampled are believed to be representative of their discipline and thus represent the subjects studied by 42% of the HE student body in 2005/06 (Source HESA 2006). The report makes a few tentative observations, such as:

- Savings in staff time as a result of implementing e-assessment in medicine could probably be replicated across both the Health and BMAF/Economics subject areas (although there is less evidence of immediate applicability in Humanities).
- Those who have provided figures for student achievement appear to be recording improvements of around 10% in pass rates as a result of the e-learning they have implemented.

The most fundamental point to come out of all of the case studies is that the appropriate use of technology is leading to significant improvements in learning and teaching across the sector and that this is translating into improved satisfaction, retention and achievement. E-Learning is facilitating the expansion of the sector without necessitating corresponding increases in the footprint of the physical estate and it is allowing broadly the same numbers of staff to educate a larger and more diverse student body. The kind of high quality, diverse, accessible, expanding higher education system desired by government and funders is no longer possible without e-learning. Continued investment and innovation in the field of e-learning is essential if the UK is to remain a world leader in education.