

Thematic Report on Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) Reports 2013-16: Technology in Learning and Teaching

Overview

In this report we highlight good practice and areas for development as featured in the ELIR Outcome and Technical Reports 2013-16. The key findings emerging from Outcome Reports in relation to **technology in learning and teaching** were:

Activity to promote good practice

- Use of the University of Aberdeen's virtual learning environment, MyAberdeen, to enhance the student experience in a range of imaginative ways, and with its development being responsive to student views.
- At Abertay University the introduction of an electronic management of assessment system has prompted reflection and the promotion of good practice around assessment and feedback practices, including short turnaround times for students to receive feedback on their assessed work.
- Students at the University of Edinburgh report high levels of satisfaction with their online distance-learning experience, indicating that they feel part of an academic community.
- At Glasgow Caledonian University, the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (LEAD) department has the potential to play a central role in the development and implementation of the University's digital strategy.
- The University of the Highlands and Islands has developed a set of blended learning standards that are scholarly and have attracted interest from universities internationally. These have been used in the development of new programmes, which is positive.
- In order to stimulate staff usage and development of the virtual learning environment, the University of the West of Scotland awards medals that recognise defined levels of good practice in online design. Targets for the achievement of medals are driving change and staff commitment to ensuring the ongoing improvement of learning sites. A variety of small working groups have also been established to provide direct help to staff on technology-enhanced learning.

Areas for development

- At Edinburgh Napier University, building on the positive work carried out at the programme level to provide a comparable student experience of module delivery, develop clear guidelines on threshold requirements for the information to be included on the virtual learning environment at module level.
- The University of Glasgow has identified e-learning as a focus for driving enhancement, and has recently published its E-Learning Strategy, which sets out its ambitions for technology-enhanced learning underpinned by a robust IT infrastructure. Staff understand and support the vision for technology-enhanced learning, however, as the University recognises in its IT Services Review Report, it is important to communicate the implications of the Strategy to all areas of the

University so that the appropriate IT infrastructure is in place to support delivery. In taking forward the implementation of the E-Learning Strategy the University should also reflect on the need to put in place appropriate staff development, as well as considering the role and location of learning technologists within the University to ensure there is appropriate support across all areas.

- At Heriot-Watt University, review availability and monitor student access to online journals and eBooks, ensuring that students are fully aware of the ways in which they can access these resources. Ensure that there is alignment between the demands of curricula and the resources available to support students achieving learning outcomes. In respect of the Dubai campus, the University should make progress to improve the learning environment and learning support provision, giving appropriate consideration to student views.
- At Queen Margaret University, address student concerns about the accessibility and extent of module information on the University's virtual learning environment, the Hub.
- At Robert Gordon University, building on policy work to clarify minimum expectations of staff and students on the threshold standards for assessment and feedback, continue to minimise the pockets of variability in assessment practices. The University should continue to reflect on the ways in which assessment expectations are communicated to students; variability in the implementation of approved procedures for marking moderation can be reduced; and issues around the timing and quality of feedback can be addressed across schools. The University is encouraged to use the implementation of online assessment, where appropriate, to review assessment practice and identify areas for improvement.
- Following the positive work that has been carried out to enhance the use of the virtual learning environment for online distance learners at Robert Gordon University, continue to support staff development in blended learning practice as well as ensuring that there is effective operational support for a growing online, off-campus community. There would be value in considering the views of online distance learners on the pace of learning, to ensure that programme delivery and organisation is flexible enough to meet the varying needs of this student group.
- The University of St Andrews was encouraged to reflect on the ways in which greater use of technology could enhance its approach to learning and teaching.
- Ensure the recent significant investment in information and communications technology infrastructure at the University of the West of Scotland will be used to enrich the learning experience of students. There would be benefit in further developing technology-enhanced learning to enable a consistent learning experience, for example when programmes are delivered across multiple sites.

Introduction

As part of the ELIR 3 method, QAA Scotland produces regular Thematic Reports to support learning from the outcomes of individual ELIR reports. The purpose of the Thematic Reports is to inform future development work in the sector and, in particular, to inform future QAA activity including work carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC).

Scope and structure of this report

This report identifies material relating to technology in learning and teaching contained within the ELIR reports for all 18 Scottish higher education institutions reviewed in the ELIR 3 cycle (2013-16). The institutions included in this report are: the University of

Aberdeen; Abertay University; the University of Dundee; the University of Edinburgh; Edinburgh Napier University; Glasgow School of Art; Glasgow Caledonian University; the University of Glasgow; Heriot-Watt University; the University of the Highlands and Islands; Queen Margaret University; Robert Gordon University; the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Scotland's Rural College (SRUC); the University of St Andrews; the University of Stirling; the University of Strathclyde and the University of the West of Scotland.

This report summarises examples of positive practice and areas for development as highlighted in the ELIR Outcome Reports (see page 1), and the more detailed findings included within the ELIR Technical Reports (see below). It is possible that additional practice takes place in these 18 institutions, but only those elements of practice included within the ELIR reports is included here. The report then outlines briefly the next steps in the ELIR process following the publication of the reports.

The annex includes references to technology in learning and teaching within the ELIR Technical Reports. The paragraph numbers used in the annex are taken directly from the original reports.

Areas highlighted in the ELIR Technical Reports

In ELIR 3, each Outcome Report sets out the ELIR team's views of positive practice and areas for development at the institution. These key findings in relation to technology in learning and teaching are summarised on page 1 of this report. This section identifies current interesting practice at the 18 institutions as identified in the longer ELIR Technical Reports.

Activity to promote good practice

Scope of activity

The University of the Highlands and Islands emphasised the ubiquitous nature of technology in supporting learning. The ELIR 3 reports show that the use of technology in learning and teaching encompasses a number of aspects:

- using technology face to face within a classroom setting
- using online technology to support delivery that is predominantly face to face
- using technology to support learning and teaching remotely (this could be in supporting part-time and distance learners and in other circumstances where students may be remote, for example in dispersed campuses and in collaborative arrangements where campuses may be located overseas).

Institutions are also using technology to enhance other aspects of the student experience and these are detailed in the following sections.

Strategic planning and investment

Information technology (or other associated terms) is identified within the strategic plans of the University of Aberdeen, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Glasgow and the University of the West of Scotland.

Both the University of Glasgow and the University of Stirling identify the important relationship between pedagogy, estates and IT infrastructure regarding the student learning experience. Investment in technology and learning is being made through staff and physical resources. For example, at the University of Edinburgh at the time of the ELIR 3, the College of Science and Engineering had created seven Chairs in Technology-enhanced Science Education to facilitate and promote the development of online and blended learning

approaches across the sciences. The University of the West of Scotland has established a new ICT strategy and invested in the development of new technology-enhanced classrooms with a commitment to introduce these across all campuses. The aim is to improve technology for increasing engagement in learning and teaching. At the University of St Andrews, the approach to using technology in learning has been 'bottom-up' rather than strategic and the focus has been on technology supporting structures rather than enhancing learning.

Virtual learning environment

In nine of the ELIR 3 reports a virtual learning environment (VLE) was identified for online learning: the University of Aberdeen, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, Scotland's Rural College and the University of Strathclyde. The VLE sometimes carries a particular brand name, as below:

- University of Aberdeen - MyAberdeen
- Glasgow Caledonian University - GCULearn
- Heriot-Watt University - VISION
- Queen Margaret University - the Hub.

Edinburgh Napier University distinguishes between its VLE, which is course specific, and its student portal, MyNapier, which enhances student-facing communications. The University of Strathclyde has implemented a single University-wide VLE. Similarly, Scotland's Rural College has been developing a new VLE.

Technology, techniques and approach

The ELIR 3 Technical Reports highlight a variety of activities and functions associated with each institution's approach to technology and learning. The University of Edinburgh aims for all of its programmes to provide students with an opportunity to take at least one online course as part of their degree. University staff considered that the University's focus on online distance learning and Massive Open Online Courses was driving change in on-campus provision. At Abertay University virtual classrooms are used. The University of Dundee's VLE includes module materials, discussion boards and programme-related information. Staff can communicate with distance learners through Skype. The University of Dundee's Library Learning Centre supports a range of online learning software, including the VLE, online assessment tools, and collaboration and documentation systems. The University of the Highlands and Islands' approach to learning and teaching makes extensive use of videoconferencing and VLEs.

A number of examples of good practice in the pedagogical use of IT were highlighted for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. A notable example from the Music discipline is the high-definition recording of student performances, which enables the students to watch and reflect on their own performances. Uploading the recordings to the e-platform enables students to critique and evaluate each other's performances, and provides a digital space for each student to develop their own portfolio and reflect on their achievements. At Glasgow Caledonian University, classroom and technology-based approaches are combined to develop student workplace and life skills; the use of blogs and wikis is included as formative coursework and to enhance communication with students on placement; and the impact of mobile technology is explored. At the University of Aberdeen, student interns are used to ensure student ideas and perspectives are taken into account in VLE development. At the University of Dundee the Student Information Technology Services-Student Management System database is integrated with the University's VLE to allow easy access for students to VLE modules and course information.

Student retention

Using the VLE to develop student retention support is being rolled out across the University of Aberdeen. The University of Dundee monitors distance learning student progress through the VLE. The University of Glasgow has an Adviser Early Warning System in place to identify students at risk of withdrawing by monitoring their attendance at classes and engagement with information technology. At the University of the Highlands and Islands student study activity is monitored to identify any lack of engagement.

Employability, employment and placements

At the University of Aberdeen graduate attributes are promoted through the VLE using a class blog, reflective journal and e-portfolio. At the University of Dundee careers support is available through an online version of the Career Planning Module. Edinburgh Napier University is developing online services, such as virtual internship fairs, to offer comparable opportunities to part-time and distance learners. At Robert Gordon University, 'My Career Toolkit', an online employability resource, supports students' transition into employment. Glasgow School of Art students commented on how helpful they found the VLE, particularly in relation to the information provided about funding and employment opportunities. The University of the Highlands and Islands is working on a project to provide placement-related online support materials for students and staff.

Transitions

Robert Gordon University uses a variety of online self-study resources available via the University VLE to support further education articulating students. Edinburgh Napier University's 'Coming from College' resource can be accessed through the University's VLE and is open for any student to self-enrol. This online support tool is designed to help college students negotiate the transition from college to university and provides additional signposting to relevant services, such as employer mentoring, study abroad, and study skills support. The University of Stirling's development of a four-year e-module is planned to flow through the student journey and is intended to facilitate the transition of the student between each year. At the University of Dundee, pre-enrolment support includes giving applicants access to the University's VLE, email system and student management system, which provides them with generic and subject-specific information and advice.

Personal tutoring and mentoring

The University of Edinburgh's Personal Tutor System uses online tools to support scheduling and recording of meetings, and training resources to support Personal Tutors. At the University of the Highlands and Islands the student mentor network is delivered online. Some students were keeping in touch with their online mentoring group through social media. MentorNet is an online student mentoring scheme operated by Queen Margaret University. At Edinburgh Napier University the student portal, MyNapier, hosts the guidance on the personal development tutor system. At Abertay University, the supervisory arrangements, formal training and monitoring for postgraduate research students is now managed through an online e-portfolio system and enables the University to maintain oversight of progress and quality of supervision, while providing the institution with the ability to identify any issues should they arise.

Student engagement and community

At the University of Edinburgh online distance learning students are encouraged to work together and establish a sense of community through a network of discussion boards, blogs, online tutorials and joint assignments. Students commented positively on: the level of personal and academic support provided to them; their online social community; the quality

and timeliness of feedback on assessments; and the extent to which their views were taken into account. At Glasgow Caledonian University, GCULearn is used to host teaching materials, assessments and discussion boards, and facilitate student engagement. Queen Margaret University uses a number of tools to engage students in their learning including online portfolios, wikis, online synchronous learning environments, and web peer assessment (WebPA). The University of the Highlands and Islands fosters a sense of belonging through the use of technology such as the VLE, social media and newsletters, including the University newsletter, The Network, which is produced monthly in term time and distributed to over 10,000 email addresses. The University of St Andrews has developed St Leonard's College, a virtual entity, as the home for all postgraduate students and runs a series of events for them.

Information provision

At Glasgow Caledonian University, module and programme handbooks are provided online. For students studying abroad at the University of St Andrews further information about the policy, grade conversion tables for different countries, and guidance about credit loads abroad are all available online. At the University of Edinburgh core support material is made available online.

Technology in the classroom

At Abertay University and the University of the West of Scotland, lecture-capture techniques are used.

E-portfolios

E-portfolios have been used successfully at Abertay University within a number of programmes as a mechanism for capturing and planning for personal and professional development. Scotland's Rural College uses e-portfolio applications. The University of Aberdeen uses e-portfolios in its graduate attributes work.

Academic skills

The University of Glasgow provides online writing support to students. At the University of St Andrews all students must complete a compulsory module on Training in Good Academic Practice, which is intended to support students to develop their academic literacy. Students are also required to undertake an online equality and diversity module. At Abertay University students who teach or supervise have access to the online Research Skills Masters Programme. Abertay's Student Enquiry Zone offers online support through live chat and email contact.

Support and other services

Online library support and a number of support services are accessible online at Glasgow Caledonian University. At the University of Dundee, library and IT services are accessible online. The University of Aberdeen operates an online course selection system called MyCurriculum, a key element of its Student Lifecycle Project. Edinburgh Napier University's E-Services Feasibility Study scopes aspirations for student-facing support services regardless of location or mode of study.

Recognition of work

The University of the Highlands and Islands has won two awards recognising its work in technology and learning. In 2012, the university won the JISC Innovation and Technology Award: Access and Inclusion for its case study on assessing the needs of remote learners

using videoconferencing technology. The University has generated a standard system of unit costs for the transformation of traditional learning materials to online and blended forms, evaluating the potential for universities to act as publishers of electronic books and learning materials, and having won a Herald newspaper Higher Education award in 2016.

Assessment and feedback

Five institutions (Abertay University, the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland's Rural College, and Robert Gordon University) are using technology to support assessment processes such as online submission of coursework and marking, providing online assessment feedback, and the use of online plagiarism-detection software. At the University of Stirling, electronic examinations facilitate the enhanced legibility of students' answers, ease of marking and more effective feedback to students. At Abertay University the move to online assessment marking and electronic feedback has had a positive impact on its National Student Survey scores.

Student feedback mechanisms

Five institutions report using online questionnaires for students to provide feedback on modules and courses: the University of the Highlands and Islands, Queen Margaret University, Robert Gordon University, the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews.

Massive Open Online Courses

The University of Edinburgh and the University of Strathclyde have been involved in developing and running Massive Open Online Courses. The University of Strathclyde reports that this has provided an opportunity to further develop expertise and experience in the design of online learning materials and teaching in online environments.

Sharing practice

Three institutions have specific mechanisms for sharing practice in the use of technology in learning and teaching. At Edinburgh Napier University the VLE Academic Forum shares ideas and best practice on technology-enhanced learning. The university's PGCert Blended and Online Education course provides an additional route to sharing good practice, for example as a result of practical projects undertaken as part of the award. The University of Stirling has 'Teaching Bites' sessions aimed at sharing good practice. The University also publishes a helpful blog that provides useful advice and information about e-learning provision and conveys reports from attendees at national level conferences. Externally, Glasgow Caledonian University is a Global Network Member of the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) community. The COIL approach has the potential to connect students and staff from 43 institutions in 14 countries using internet-based tools. COIL also supports use of blended learning and technologies, such as use of video capture in teaching and learning.

Collaboration

Abertay University, the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow Caledonian University and Heriot-Watt University highlighted aspects of online learning with respect to collaboration activity. For example, at Abertay University, staff employed by collaborative partners can access online resources and a calendar of continuing professional development events is run at partner institutions to foster sharing of practice and staff exchange. At Edinburgh Napier University, technology underpins the delivery of an equitable student learning experience to all students regardless of location. Online versions of student development workshops developed in the VLE were identified as an enhancement to

transnational education provision. At Glasgow Caledonian University, academic and support staff from the careers service, and student officers provide support for the University's London postgraduate student community. This is achieved using online technologies for student services, including the library, Skype and visiting staff. For example, the Glasgow-based careers service populate the resource base in partnership with the university's London staff, provide videoconference sessions, and take email enquiries and videoconference interviews. Glasgow Caledonian University students studying in South Africa have access to digital library resources, and the University plans to look at developing a platform based on mobile technology.

Staff training

Online training of staff was highlighted in 12 institutions. Online training covered both training of staff to support technology-enhanced learning and teaching but also training in other matters. For example, Abertay University, the University of Aberdeen, the University of Dundee, and the University of Edinburgh offer online training for staff on equality and diversity.

Four institutions offer their tertiary awards for new, inexperienced staff through online delivery:

- the Learning and Teaching Online and Assessment Online modules at the University of Dundee, which contribute to the PGCert Higher Education Teaching, are delivered online and staff have commented on the effectiveness of its support for their learning and teaching practice
- Edinburgh Napier University offers a PGCert in Blended and Online Learning, aimed at developing staff to better support students on distance learning programmes. Online and face-to-face workshops are provided to support staff engagement with technology-enhanced learning
- at Glasgow Caledonian University there is an online version of the Postgraduate Certificate Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
- the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is considering expanding its PGCert to online delivery to increase its flexibility.

Other online staff development activities are also being undertaken, examples of which are as follows.

- Heriot-Watt University has developed an online resource to support new managers in all campus locations. The university's Professional Development Programme (known as GlobalPD) has been piloted through VLE online delivery.
- Queen Margaret University is developing the capacity to provide staff development for partners through a programme of online 'webinars'.
- The University of Strathclyde's Teaching and Learning Online course has been effective in improving digital literacy among staff and in the development of online learning resources.
- The University of Stirling delivers events through an E-Learning Forum that are accessible to staff teaching on remote campuses, covering topics such as electronic marking.
- At the University of the West of Scotland, smaller task-oriented groups focus on specific skills development needs. In particular, the ELIR team noted the positive role played by groups such as HINT (Help I'm No Techie), LATTE (Learning and Teaching Technology Enhancement) and FLIT (Flexible Learning using Information Technology) in providing staff development to support technology-enhanced learning and teaching. Newly-appointed academic staff, without prior teaching experience, are required to take a short online induction course.

Student training on technology

One institution, the University of the Highlands and Islands, has developed an 'Essential Student Skills' module, which provides training and support for students using the technology. The ELIR team considered this to be an excellent resource.

Specialist staff

In three ELIR reports, reference was made to specialist staff support. Edinburgh Napier University has a dedicated Learning Technologist embedded in each faculty to provide staff with hands-on support and one-to-one guidance. At Heriot-Watt University, schools use VISION Champions to facilitate the sharing of good practice and improvement of e-learning services. Queen Margaret University has a technology-enhanced learning team that provides support to help academic staff engage with new technologies and the University's virtual learning environment. Glasgow Caledonian University have Blended Learning Champions to introduce new and innovative ways of learning.

Governance

Three institutions have established groups to enhance technology and learning provision. The University of Dundee operates an e-Learning Subcommittee, which represents the interest of distance learners and this method of course delivery. The University of Edinburgh has established a task group to support and oversee the mainstreaming of distance education within the University. Edinburgh Napier University established the Digital Futures Working Group in early 2013 to review and evaluate current activities, to identify short-term initiatives that can build on current good practice and develop recommendations for future developments and opportunities.

Standards

Three institutions have implemented initiatives aimed at improving practice in technology-enhanced learning. Edinburgh Napier University has endorsed a technology-enhanced learning standard. This takes the form of a Benchmark for the Use of Technology in Modules and the underpinning 3E Framework (the 3E referring to enhance, extend, empower). The learning standard is incorporated in the University's Academic Strategy. At Robert Gordon University the 2013-14 Learning Expectations staff development project aimed to enhance use of the VLE for distance learning students by restructuring online module material into a more common format across the University, with the results audited by each faculty. The University of the Highlands and Islands promotes equivalence of academic support for all students through a set of blended learning standards. The University of the Highlands and Islands Essential Student Skills Online Project aims to gather and refine existing learning resources to ensure that all students across the partnership have access to the same level of high quality provision, designed to support the entire student journey. In order to stimulate staff usage and development of the VLE, the University of the West of Scotland awards medals that recognise defined levels of good practice in online design. Targets for the achievement of medals are driving change and staff commitment to ensuring the ongoing improvement of learning sites.

Areas for development

This section of the paper outlines the areas for development identified relating to technology in learning and teaching in a higher education institution in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports.

Variable staff and student engagement

An area of development for five institutions is around variability of VLE use by staff (the University of Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University and the University of St Andrews). At Queen Margaret University, students spoke of variable experience of using tools (online portfolios, wikis, online synchronous learning environments and web peer assessment) within their programmes, some using them extensively and others not at all. St Leonard's College was established by St Andrew's University as a virtual 'home' for all postgraduate students. The 'virtual' nature of the College seemed to militate against the promotion of strong student engagement. Students told the ELIR team that they tended to identify with other places, such as their school, research centre or hall of residence rather than the College but appreciated the effort to create a postgraduate community, indicating it was likely to evolve over time.

Reliability and accessibility of materials

Students at the University of Dundee also reported difficulties in finding and accessing materials and problems with reliability. Postgraduate students at the University of St Andrews commented that greater use could be made of the VLE to provide improved access to electronic resources, primarily books.

Other areas for development

At the University of Edinburgh there had been a thematic review of online/distance taught postgraduate provision in the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. The ELIR team recommended there would be benefit in the University disseminating the outcomes of the review to all staff involved in online distance learning provision across the institution.

What happens next?

QAA Scotland follows up the ELIR outcomes with institutions individually through annual discussion visits, and each institution is required to produce a Follow-up Report indicating how it has addressed its own ELIR outcomes. QAA Scotland also promotes collaborative working between institutions to share good practice and to find collective solutions to common areas for development. Each institution is invited to participate in a follow-up event to engage with the ways other institutions that were reviewed at around the same point of the ELIR cycle have addressed their review outcomes.

Index of references to Technology in Learning and Teaching in the ELIR 3 Technical Reports

The paragraph numbers below refer to those in the original ELIR 3 Technical Reports for each institution.

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	48	Technology, engagement in learning and teaching, technology-enhanced classrooms
	49	Personalised learning experience, ICT infrastructure, VLE, technology-enhanced learning, academic experience, lecture capture
	60	Task-oriented groups, skills development needs, HINT (Help I'm No Techie), LATTE (Learning and Teaching Technology Enhancement), (Flexible Learning using Information Technology)
	68	Staff online induction course, three-day teaching preparation course, Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
	70	VLE, medals recognising defined levels of practice in online design, systematic evaluation, range and quality of online tools and resources, use of the VLE, student feedback

QAA1872 - May 17

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