The Future of e-Learning

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Outline

- What is e-Learning?
- E-Learning today
  - Reflection on the Liverpool/Laureate programmes
  - Quality in Online Learning
- The future
  - Some thoughts
What is e-Learning?

1. “Any learning that uses ICT” *(UK Government definition)*
   - *Computer-Assisted Learning*

2. “Using new multimedia technology and Internet to improve quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services…..” *(European Commission)*
   - *Electronic Distance Learning*

3. **Internet-mediated** Learning
   - Not essentially about technology, but *communication*
“on-line learning offers a richer pedagogy than traditional forms of distance education, *if only because of*...communication and interactivity (Curran, 2001)

**Collaboration** “may be the single most important concept for online networked learning” (Harasim, 2000)

**Discussion** is the common feature that is key to these conceptions
e-Learning today

- Use of ICT in education: *universal*
- Internet access to learning resources: *ubiquitous*
  - (at all levels of education)
- Electronic distance learning: *becoming widespread*
- Interactive e-Learning: *still very limited*
  - Lack of public understanding
  - Fears about *quality* and *standards*
Concerns about e-Learning

- “Academic standards will be lower”
- “Quality of learning experience will be poor”
- “Qualification will not be recognised”

- **Alienation:**
  - Lack of personal contact/social interaction
  - Low student involvement, lack of intellectual challenge and dialogue
  - Technology-dominated

- **Low quality:**
  - Low teacher involvement, little student support
  - Low cost, low value
  - Fears about impersonation and plagiarism
Key issues

- How can we make e-Learning a positive learning experience?
  - Focus on *Pedagogy* rather than technology
  - The role of *discussion*

- How can we promote public acceptance?
  - Emphasis on *standards*
  - Quality and *quality assurance*
UoL/ Laureate e-Learning

Aims:

- **Academic Standards:**
  - Comparability with on-campus programmes
  - Adherence to QAA guidelines
  - Standard procedures: External Examiners, Annual Programme Monitoring, Boards of Studies, etc.

- **Learning Experience:**
  - Continuous active engagement with the programme
  - Interaction and collaboration with teachers and colleagues
Liverpool University online degrees

- Wholly Internet-delivered
- Asynchronous interactive model
- (Mainly) Master’s degree programmes (MSc, MBA, MPH etc).
- Targeted at working professionals
- First programme (MSc in IT) launched in April 2000
- Now around 5000 students

Europe’s largest wholly online Higher Education Programme
Organisational structure

- Management, infrastructure and recruitment: Laureate Online Education (Amsterdam)
- Module development and delivery: academics worldwide
- Academic oversight and quality assurance: University of Liverpool
Key aspects

- **Collaborative learning:**
  - Students work together (in the whole class or smaller groups)
  - Outside experience of students brought in to help others (most students are working professionals)

- Key role of *moderated discussion* (an assessed component)

- Small classes (maximum of 20 students) per class

- Intensive involvement
Quality Assurance

- **Essential:**
  - to maintain credibility of programme
  - to ensure not driven by commercial pressures
  - To maintain control of a distributed operation

- **Need a tighter QA framework than in on-campus teaching**
  - Cultural differences (e.g., different understandings about grading)
  - Lack of opportunity for *informal* consensus

- **Aspects:**
  - Academic control retained by University
  - Standards: validated by University procedures
  - Monitoring delivery
The University’s role

- Overall responsibility for all academic aspects of online programmes
  - Admissions standards
  - Curriculum
  - Teaching quality
  - Quality of Learning Experience
  - Assessment standards and outcomes
Mechanisms

- Module monitoring
  - Oversight and review of all classes
- Moderation of assessment
  - Part of the module monitoring process
- Board of Studies
  - Review of curriculum, etc.
- Board of Examiners
  - Review of assessment outcomes
  - Ownership of Standards
  - External examiners
- University Processes
  - Board of Faculty, etc.
Monitoring delivery

- All communications (including feedback and other private instructor/student communications) are viewable
- Each virtual classroom monitored online by on-campus academics
- Module monitoring verifies:
  - Adherence to curriculum, procedures, etc
  - Maintenance of academic standards
  - Teaching quality
  - Assessment outcomes
Module reports

At the end of each class:

- Students complete questionnaire: anonymised summary distributed
- Instructor completes structured report on class
- University Monitor reviews and adds further report
- Reports finally reviewed by Board of Studies
Summary

- Emphasis on discussion, collaboration
  - Re-introduces some of the characteristics of seminar-based learning

- Costs: *not* a low-cost model
  - High instructor involvement (discussion, assessment and feedback)

  - Effective and successful e-Learning (always?) has these characteristics
  - Future expansion requires this to be better understood
Some views

“The camaraderie between fellow students and tutors was phenomenal”.

“.I have forged great friendships..”

“.two and a half years of highly enjoyable, energysapping, inspiring effort..”

“The intensity was high, but the classroom discussions made the courses lively..”

“.one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences of my life.”

(comments of e-Learning graduates)
Some outcomes

• QAA ‘Developmental Engagement’ with CS:
  ▪ **Confidence in Academic Standards and Quality of Learning Opportunities**
  ▪ “…distinctive DL MSc has…effective moderation and monitoring procedures”

• MSc External Examiner:
  ▪ “The programme is a beacon for UK Higher Education on how to run an online degree programme”

• MBA External Examiner:
  ▪ “…the standards of this course are comparable to other highly regarded MBA programmes……. a model of best practice”.
The Future (easy predictions)

- Interactive e-Learning will become an accepted way to study off-campus
  - Opening opportunities for high-quality education to many more people

- e-Learning will be widely used in on-campus teaching
  - Supporting a more vibrant learning experience, with much greater opportunities for group learning, collaboration, debate….

- The internet will become (has already become?) the primary source of information for most learners.
  - But…..
Internet Information

- What are the implications of getting information from the internet?

The present:
- almost instant access to information
- Implications for “fact-based” education

- How useful is it to impart “information” when students (everyone) can find information whenever they need it anyway?

- How can we assess students in ways that don’t over-emphasise “facts”? 
The day after tomorrow…

- Search engines will become much more “intelligent” (cf. the *Turing Test*)
  - Capable of answering much more complex questions
  - Producing uniquely customised answers

- What will that mean for our approach to education and assessment?
  - Communication and collaboration will *still* be key skills