
Thoughts for the future

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The case studies described in this book all include elements of collaboration. For the most part, the collaboration is within a single institution. As we all know from personal experience, it is not always easy to work with other people, even colleagues in the same department, especially if our views on content, methodology and/or assessment do not coincide. It can be especially difficult to use materials produced by other people.

The Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) made available over £30 million for the development of software by and for higher education institutions (HEIs) with the express intention that the software should not simply be used by the development site, but by HEIs throughout the UK. As the TLTP deliverables find their way into institutions, an important part of the evaluation process is to ascertain just how widespread is their use, what kind of difficulties and delights lecturers experience as they introduce the materials into courses, and the extent to which the 'not invented here' syndrome prejudices their implementation.

The setting up of the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) in Scotland has been done at a cost of £11 million. The MANs initiative has taken the notion of shared resources one

stage further. Whilst one likely outcome was to facilitate communication among the research community by means of video conferencing and the high speed transfer of various data types, it was also envisaged that the networks would provide the infrastructure to enable HEIs to share learning technology applications electronically. The Use of MANs Initiative (UMI) supports this through a programme for the development of applications which make use of the MANs' infrastructure.

Collaboration is an important word in the vocabulary of the future of learning technology. It is a challenging word, in an environment in which diversity of provision is valued. No one is going to pretend that it will be easy to collaborate in the development of new learning technology resources, or to implement the shared products. One of the most important challenges for the future, therefore, will be to identify areas in courses across institutions where there is a consensus about the benefits that learning technology can bring, both by improving the quality of the learning environment for the student and also by freeing up staff time to engage in the vital tutor/student dialogue which is an essential component of higher education, and which, itself, is increasingly likely to take place on-line.