University of East London

Cass School of Education

Data Report – Survey of Secondary PGCE trainees 2008/9

Evaluation Virtual Schools Wiki

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1.0 Introduction

Virtual Schools is a pilot e-learning initiative for trainee teachers on the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme in the Cass School of Education at the University of East London. It was initiated and developed by Kathy Wright, Director of Secondary Education, with support from colleagues on the secondary teaching team.

This data report draws on findings from a survey of trainees in 2008/9 cohort (full details of the survey are set out in the methodology section below) and forms part of a wider on-going research and evaluation of the pilot initiative. The ongoing evaluation is formative in nature and is being used to inform and develop teaching and learning within the Virtual School element of the PGCE programme in particular as well as the programme in general.

2.0 Context

Prensky (2001) characterises the current generation of school and university students as 'digital natives' who are inhabitants of a 'digital world' and lays down the following challenge to teachers and academics,

> *Educators have slid into the 21st century – and into the digital age – still doing a great many things the old way. It's time for education leaders to raise their heads above the daily grind and observe the new landscape that's emerging. Recognizing and analysing its characteristics will help to define the education leadership with which we should be providing our students, both now and in the coming decades. Times have changed. So, too, have the students, the tools and the requisite skills and knowledge'.* (Prensky 2005: 21)

His challenge and the failure it implies is echoed in a recent report from the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) in the UK which states that the potential of technology in developing learning 'is fully exploited by only 20 per cent of schools and colleges' (Becta 2008). There has certainly been considerable interest in the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) to promote student learning in Higher Education (see, for example, Banks, 2006; Doolan 2007; Leeds and Gould, in preparation). And in teacher education VLEs, often using institutional e-learning platforms such as Blackboard or WebCT are now routinely used to disseminate information to students, to provide resource banks and, in some cases, to facilitate communication and on-line discussions amongst students and their peers and tutors (see, for example, Waring and Boardman, 2004). More extensive and innovative use of VLEs in teacher education is to be seen in the use of wikis to support student learning (Wright 2007). The Learning from the Middle Initiative, promoted by the National College of School Leadership in England also makes use of VLEs. In this training programme for middle managers in schools, teacher participants are asked to 'work' in a virtual school, undertaking a series of on-line management tasks designed to simulate those which might face them in their actual roles.

But we would argue that, with the exception of these initiatives, few curriculum development projects in teacher education have exploited the full potential of virtual learning in order to enhance professional learning for pre-service students, many of whom could be classed as members of the 'digital generation'. In the main, teacher education continues to adhere to long established and often experiential and individualised learning modes, based around students' presence in either school classrooms or university seminar rooms. Yet it would seem particularly important that new teachers entering the profession understand the

potential of e-learning to contribute to both their own learning and to the learning of their future pupils. In order to achieve, it seems logical to suggest that pre-service students should encounter high quality and positive experiences and models of how e-learning, including collaborative on-line technologies, can develop and enhance both individual and collaborative knowledge.

This working report is part of an ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of a curriculum initiative which uses Web 2.0 technology and the institution's VLE as part of a blended learning approach in promoting problem based learning on the professional studies element of a secondary pre-service Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course. In the report we describe the curriculum initiative and then attempt to consider the differentiated and highly varied professional learning which our analyses show was taking place on the VLE.

2.1 Contexts for the curriculum initiative

In this section we outline the development of the curriculum initiative. This development was inevitably framed by the current state requirements for the attainment of qualified teacher status (QTS) in England (TDA 2007), as well as by the discourses and practices around teacher learning and the acquisition of professional knowledge found in University Department of Education (UDEs) and their partnership schools. These multiple (and often contradictory and contested) ideas form the context for both the curriculum initiative and the research and evaluation study.

As noted previously this curriculum iniatitve was implemented the secondary Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme at the University of East London. The secondary PGCE is a one year course for pre-service students intending to teach pupils aged from 11 to 18 years. It is taken after the completion of a subject specialist under-graduate degree. In line with the partnership requirements for all ITE in England, these courses contain both university- and school-based elements, but students spend most of their time working in their placement schools. Many such programmes in England structure the university-based part of their courses into two broad elements: subject specialist studies, in which the students learn the pedagogical content knowledge and skills to teach their specialist subject, working only in subject specific groups; and general professional studies, in which broader elements of professional learning, including whole school issues, are addressed by student groups drawn from across a number of subject areas. In the latter, element topics covered include Citizenship, Special Educational Needs, English as an Additional Language, Assessment for Learning, Literacy across the curriculum etc. Students experience placements in at least two different schools during their programme. These schools are drawn from the university's partnerships of schools, which are mainly based in a large city and sometimes deemed by the government to be 'schools in challenging circumstances'. But partnership schools differ greatly, with implications for the diversity of placement situations which students can face (for example, they can be placed in single sex, selective, inner city, suburban, local authority or foundation schools and academies.)

The Virtual Schools curriculum initiative came about in response to a number of national and institutional developments. At programme level, there were two broad imperatives for the initiative: first and foremost of these was a strong interest in using Web 2.0 technologies to generate new modes of professional learning for the students; the second was to ensure a more systematic and meaningful integration of the subject specialist and general professional studies elements of the course. These two imperatives are now briefly described.

The university in question has a sustained history of engagement in e-learning work. On this particular programme, previous e-learning initiatives to encourage students to engage in virtual learning had included the use of a wiki to support induction information (hosted by www.pbwiki.com) (Wright 2007). The aim of the Virtual Schools initiative was, however, more

ambitious in that it was designed to create communal VLEs to extend and support the existing learning environments within university and school classrooms. This was in essence then a blended learning programme in which use of the VLE was designed to be integrated alongside the existing traditional provision for professional learning in the university and in the partnership schools. The Virtual Schools were designed as collaborative environments in which students could generate professional learning, whilst engaging in problem-based learning (PBL) tasks. This mode of learning is well established in teacher education (McPhee 2002; Steinkuehler et al, 2002) as a way of enabling students to engage with professional issues and to develop critical thinking skills. Like all PBL activities, the on-line tasks were designed to simulate authentic professional issues and dilemmas.

But although the initiative drew on established PBL frameworks, it also aimed to provide an e-space in which new forms of learning could be created rather than 'an (e-learning) environment where existing teaching spaces and practices are simply reproduced' (Littleton & Bayne, 2008: 27). Drawing on Lave & Wenger's (1991) understanding of induction in work-based learning as occurring through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, a key idea behind the Virtual Schools was to situate learning within a simulated 'real' and communal context of a school, enabling students to engage in both individual and communal on-line learning. Placed, in the main, near the beginning of the PGCE programme, the Virtual Schools work was conceptualised as a type of early professional induction activity, simulating aspects of workplace learning and providing students with a flavour of what it would be like to be immersed in the communal and complex cultures of schools. Furthermore, the work enabled inexperienced students to engage in the discussion and resolution of complex professional issues in the safe and simulated environment of the Virtual Schools. In the virtual environment they were taking on some extended professional roles and activities which would not normally be available to them as novice professionals. The Virtual Schools were then conceptualised as a way of harnessing the potentially increased levels of challenge, motivation and engagement which technology can offer to create simulated workplace learning and accelerated professional induction opportunities within the ITE programme.

The second imperative was driven in part by changing requirements for ITE at the national level with the revised Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status in England being introduced by the Training and Development Agency in 2007 (TDA 2007). These standards gave enhanced focus to the development of broad professional knowledge and values within ITE programmes, by including three new areas in the standards (the Children's Agenda [following the UK government's Every Child Matters policy], personalised learning and new professionalism, including enhanced expectations of teamwork and collaboration). These areas had to be incorporated into all pre-service courses, placing greater emphasis on the core professional studies element of many ITE courses.

At programme level, reviews, observations of teaching sessions and student evaluations had all identified the need to increase student engagement in the core professional education sessions and to embed this element more effectively in the programme as a whole. Many core general professional studies sessions in this university, as in many other institutions, take place in large, tiered rooms where group work is difficult to organise and student interaction is inevitably limited. Peer observation of sessions and trainee evaluations had shown that, although all sessions were delivered by knowledgeable and skilled practitioners from both the university and partnership schools, there was a wide range in the types and levels of trainee engagement. Some students were clearly learning during the sessions and benefiting from the psychological, sociological and cultural theories underlying the sessions. But others found it difficult to make the connections between teaching their subject specialism and the broader theoretical and practical ideas about professional practice which they encountered in the core sessions. In this programme student evaluations have routinely revealed that subject sessions are more highly rated than core sessions. This accords with research (see, for example, Lacey, 1977; Hobson et al, 2005; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004) indicating that subject specialism is an important part of emerging professional

identities for student teachers and a powerful socialisation force for serving teachers and their learning.

To address these imperatives, the Virtual Schools initiative was invented and developed by the programme director (Kathy Wright), in consultation with the university-based tutor team, the school-based educators within the partnership schools and external advisors. The aim was to give all students a 'second life' by allocating each individual to a virtual school (Wright 2007) in which problem-based learning could take place, with ideas, issues and problems being discussed both during face-to-face meetings and in the e-learning site. Part of the core professional studies element of the programme was then based within a simulated 'real' context. At the early stages of development views were sought from the partnership on the value and the viability of the concept and on ideas for practical case studies and problem scenarios which could be 'dropped' into the virtual schools. The consensus from these initial consultations was that implementing the virtual schools, alongside elements of the existing core sessions, had great potential to link disparate areas of professional studies work and to enhance the links between university- and school-based work.

All students were allocated to a 'Virtual School' with the expectation that they would contribute to a series of problem-based learning tasks set for them by tutors. Students were asked to make individual postings as well as working communally in their Virtual School environments. There were 12 virtual schools, each with approximately 15 students in it. Six activities were completed within each Virtual School. As figure 1 indicates, the focus of the activities included cross curricular learning, SEN and EAL.

Figure 1: Virtual School activities in chronological order

Focus	Outline of student activity
Curriculum statements for the virtual school	Developing rationales for the place of their subject specialism in the virtual school's curriculum
Analysing the context of the virtual school	Interpreting and analysing statistical data for the virtual school.
Pupil Transition from Primary school to Secondary school	Developing strategies and activities to facilitate pupils move into secondary schools.
Every Child Matters implementation	Deciding on how the Virtual School should implement the five outcomes of this legislation. Sharing resultant strategies across the schools.
Support and teaching strategies for English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils	Deciding on strategies for welcoming to the Virtual School an 11 year old pupil from Eastern Europe with no knowledge of English language.
Case studies of pupils with Special Educational Needs	Sharing information about Special Educational Needs pupils who were giving rise to concerns amongst staff. Researching SEN conditions and deciding on strategies for provision.
Anti Bullying strategies	Researching bullying in schools and anti-bullying strategies. Initiating action in the Virtual School to protect a bullied child.

The initial Virtual School activities took place on the dedicated wiki which had also been used to support the programme's introduction. Later activities were located on a dedicated site inside the university's e-learning platform. None of the activities were assessed and there was no compulsion for students to contribute actively either on-line or in face-to-face school 'meetings'.

A guiding influence in the development of the clusters of research questions and the research design was the evaluation framework use in the evaluation of the curriculum initiative. This drew on Bastiaens, Boon & Martens' (2004:167) adaptation of Kilpatrick's four level framework for use in the evaluation of virtual learning initiatives. Bastiaens et al argue that evaluation should include all of these levels :

Level 1: reaction of participants to programme
Level 2: participant learning which results
Level 3: behaviour change of individuals
Level 4: organizational improvements

In this case level 1 was taken to involve focusing on the students' and staff perceptions of the initiative; levels 2 and 3 looked for any resultant student learning (in terms of their professional knowledge, skills and attitudes) and the contribution which activity in the VLE made to other elements of the programme. Level 4 involved identifying improvements in the professional learning resulting across the 'organisation' (here taken to mean the overall programme, including how, for example, any learning in the Virtual Schools work enhanced the existing university-based face-to-face teaching and teaching experience in partnership schools).

3.0   Research questions

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The research questions for wider on going research are:

RQ1: Can participation in 'virtual schools' as communities of practice promote the creation of individual and communal professional knowledge on a PGCE (ITE) course? If so, what kind of professional knowledge is being developed?

RQ2: How does communal engagement in the VLE vary across the virtual schools? Are there discernable patterns in terms of the composition of the groups which have impacted on the effectiveness of any learning taking place?

RQ3: How does individual engagement in the VLE vary? Are there any discernable patterns in relation to factors (such as previous learning histories, school subject, age or gender) which have impacted on any learning occurring?

4.0   Research Instrument

A self completion paper based questionnaire was designed to be handed out and handed back at the end of plenary session. Whilst most of the questions had fixed choice responses text boxes were provided for respondents to elaborate on their responses as well as addressing specific questions. The questionnaire is reproduced as Appendix 2.

5.0   Findings

In this section we present the results from the self completion questionnaire. Our findings resonate with findings collected from focus group interviews conducted with the previous year's cohort.

5.1 Using the Virtual Schools Wiki

This section sought to identify how respondents engaged with the VS Wiki by asking questions about access and usage as well as exploring issues around contributing to the wiki.

Access & Use

How easy was it to access the public VS Wiki?
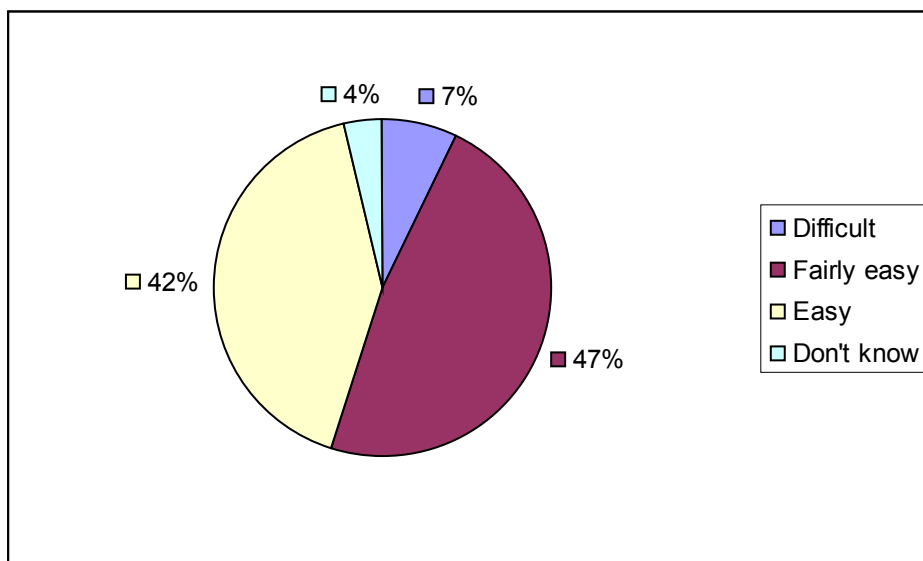
It is clear from this response that the majority of respondents found using the *public* VS wiki easy, with only 7% finding it difficult.

How easy is it to access the private VS Wiki?
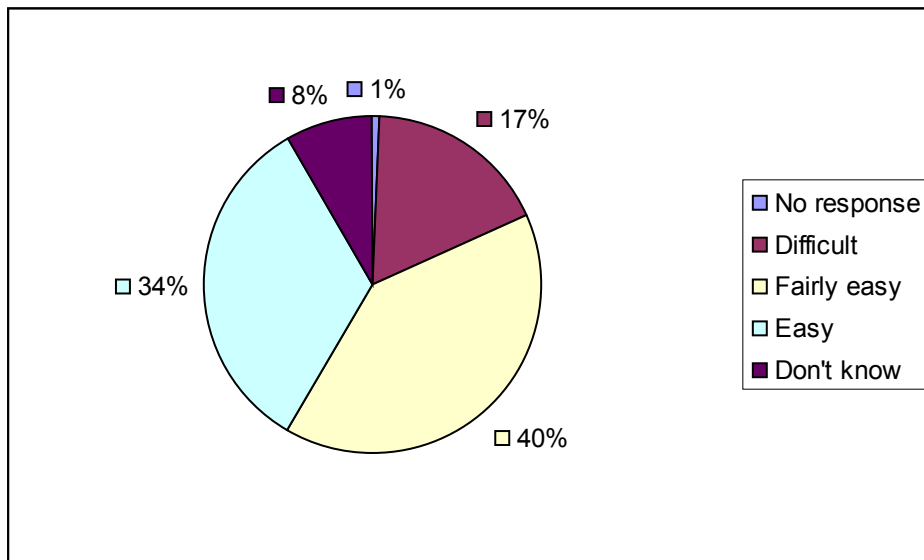
In contrast with the public VS wiki, more respondents (17%) found using the private VS wiki difficult. However the vast majority (74%) still found using the public VS wiki fairly easy or easy.
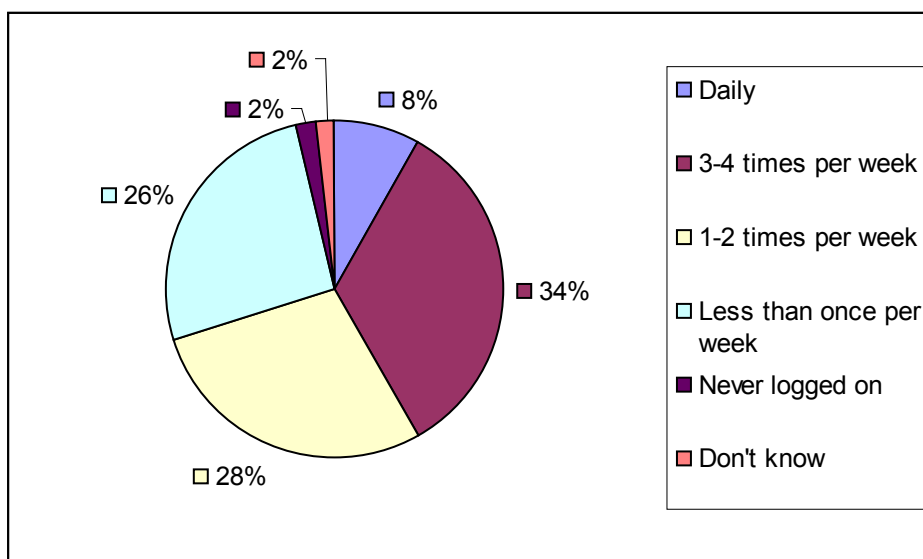
How easy is it to use the VS Wiki?
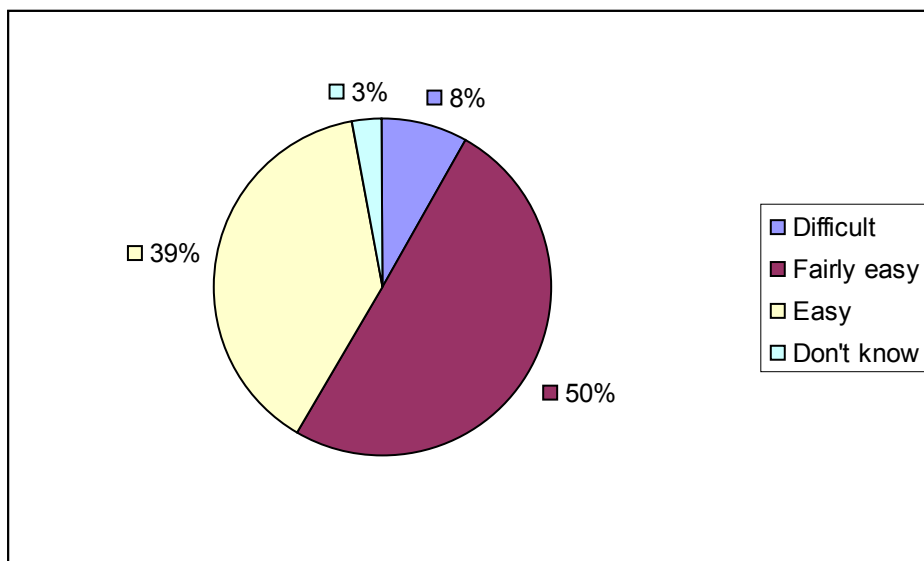
Overall it is clear that the vast majority of respondents found using the VS wiki easy, with only 8% finding it difficult.
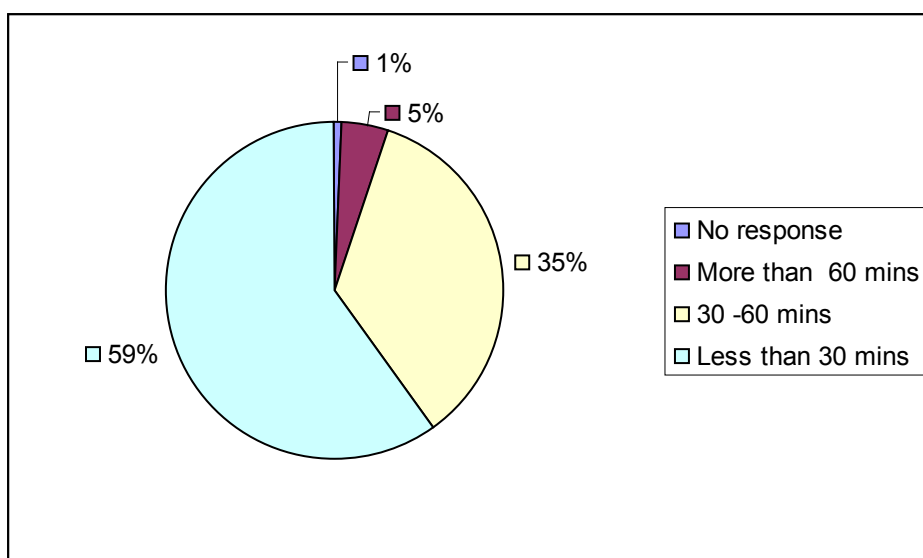
Usage

Before you went out on your placement, on average, how often did you log onto the VS Wiki?

The frequency of logging on to the VS wiki varied significantly between respondents. A small minority (8%) logged on daily, while 62% logged on at least once per week, with a slight majority of these logging on more than three times per week. Only a very small minority did not log on to the wiki at all before their placement (2%).

When you did log onto the VS Wiki, on average, how long was each session?
Please include any time spent composing text offline in a word processing package.

From this question it is clear that the vast majority of respondents (94%) spent between 30 and 60 minutes per session with the VS wiki, with most of these (56%) spending less than 30 minutes at a time. A very small minority (5%) spent over an hour on the VS wiki at a time.

When we cross tabulate the responses to the questions *Before you went out on your placement, on average, how often did you log onto the VS Wiki*, and *When you did log onto the VS Wiki, on average, how long was each session* – we can see that there is a small correlation between frequency of use and time per session spent on the VS wiki. That is, those that logged on less than once per week were more likely to have shorter sessions of less than 30 minutes. However, when logging on more frequently (between 1 and 4 times per week) respondents were somewhat more likely to log on for less than 30 minutes, although this was fairly evenly split between this and session times of 30 – 60 minutes. Alongside this when examining longer session times, most of the minority who logged on longer than 60 minutes did so once a week.
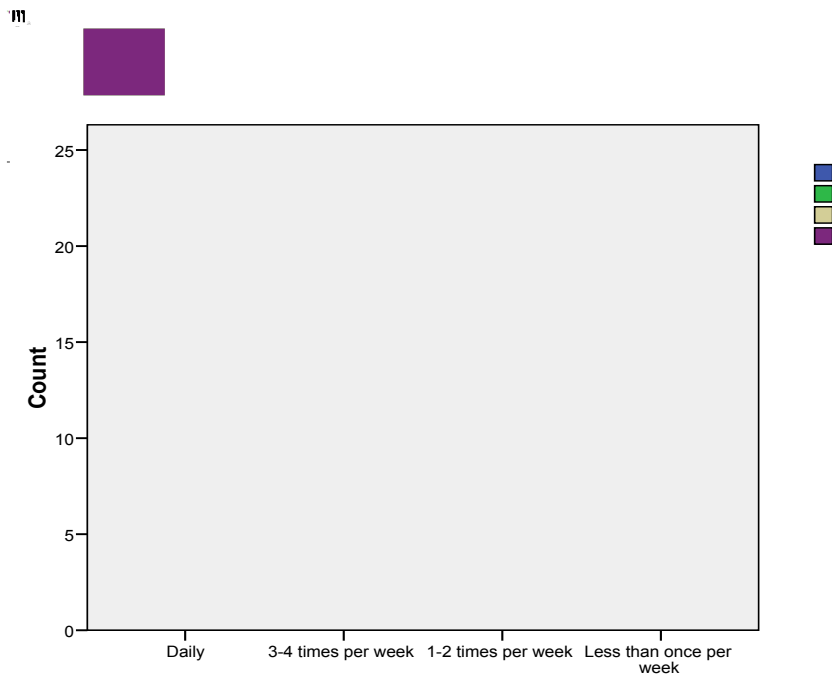

Thinking about a typical session on the VS Wiki, on average, how much time did you spend on the following activities?

Reading content (own VS)

11
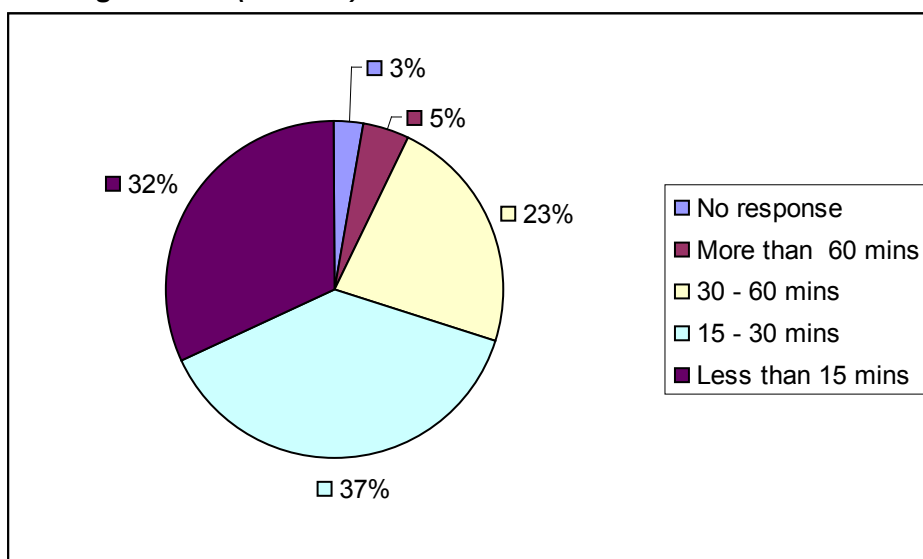
When looking at the breakdown of time spent on activities in the wiki, a more complete picture emerges. Here, when considering the time spent on reading the content on one's own VS wiki, many respondents (69%) spent less than 30 minutes, with a slight majority of these spending lass than 15 minutes. Only a small minority of 5% spent more than 60 minutes on this task.

Reading content (other VS)
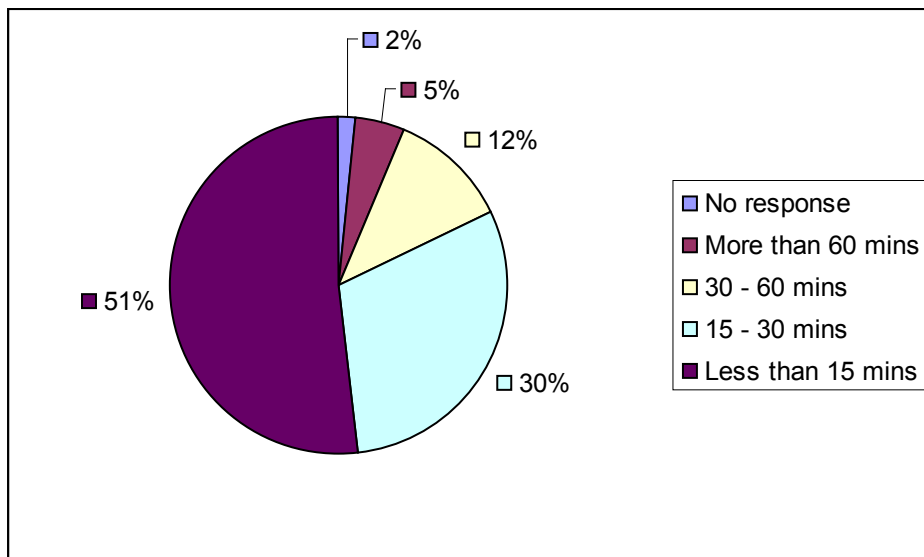
When looking at time spent reading other people's VS wikis, a slight majority of 51% were engaged in this task for less than 15 minutes. Overall 81% spent less than 30 minutes doing this.

Posting /composing content
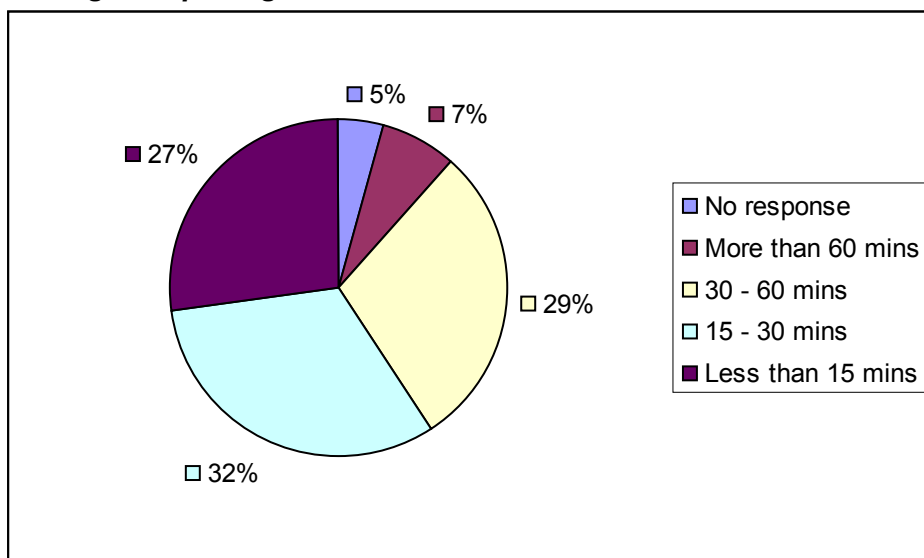
Time spent on posting or composing content shows more of an even split in the time taken to perform this task. Close to a third of respondents spent 30 – 60 minutes, 15 – 30 minutes, and less than 15 minutes on these content related activities.

Editing content
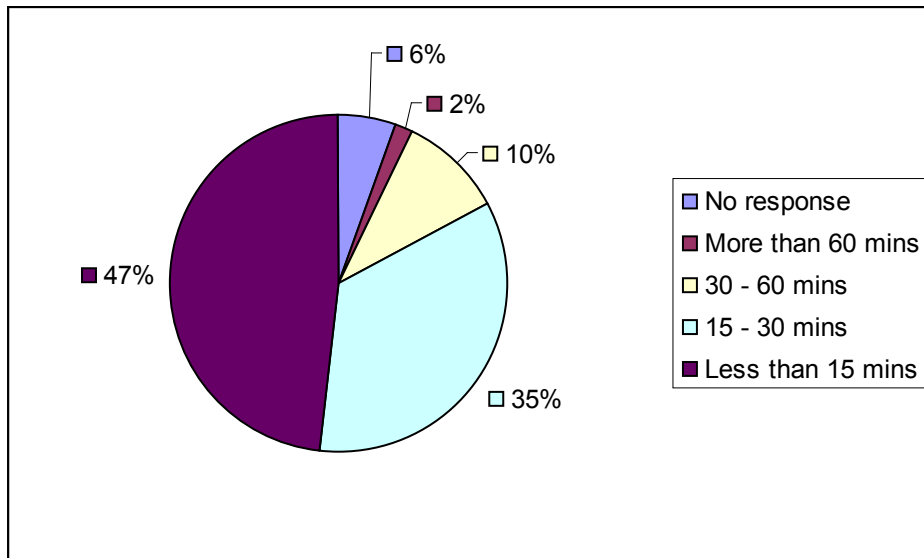
With regards to time spent editing content, 82% of respondents spent less than 30 minutes with this task, and most of those spent less than 15 minutes. This is backed up by some of the qualitative responses in section 2.11 below, where many respondents stated they did not edit any content (including their own), and/or that they felt uncomfortable editing others content.

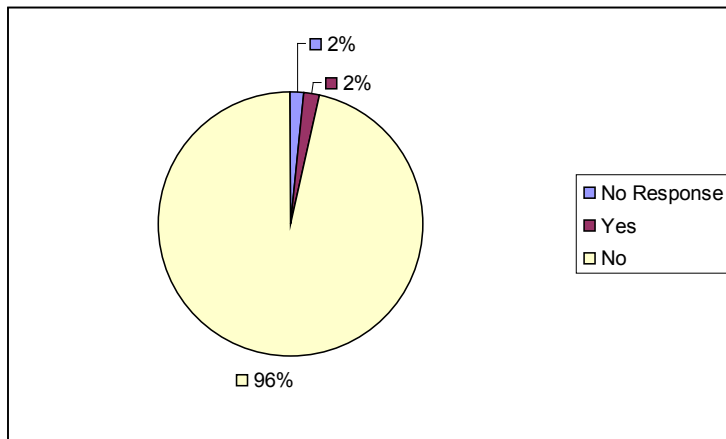## *Where do you normally access the VS Wiki from?*
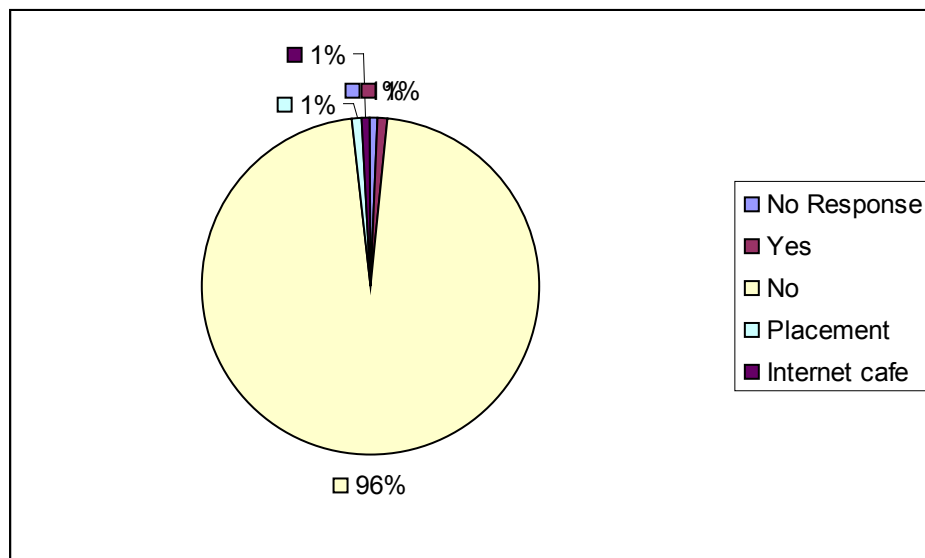
University?
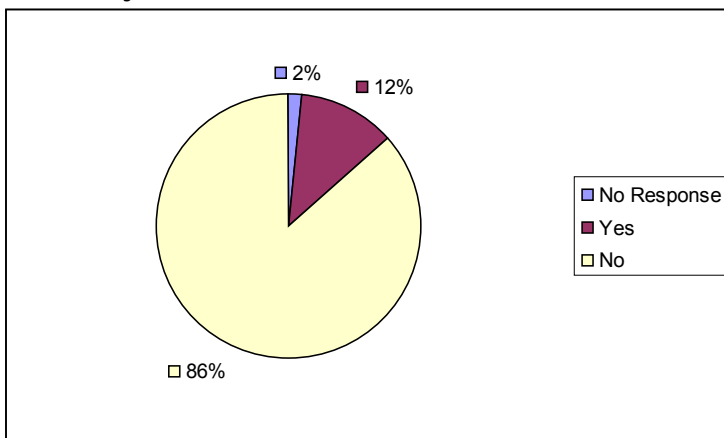
Home?
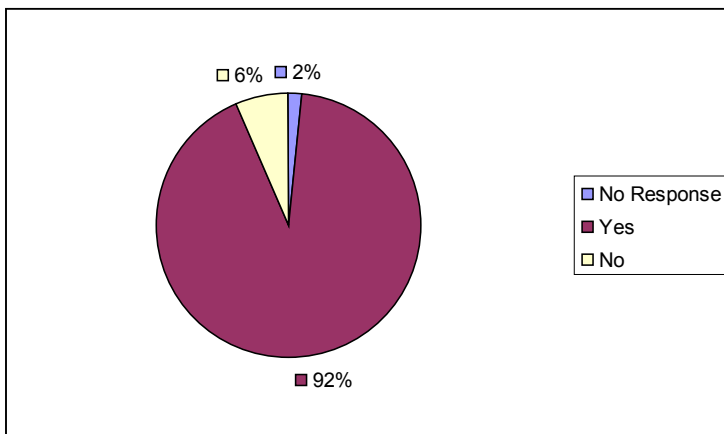
Work?

It is clear that most respondents do not access the wiki from university (86% do not), nor from work (96% do not). The vast majority access the VS wiki from home (92%).

Other?

When asked about other places that respondents access the VS wiki from, there were very few who do not access from home, work or university. In fact there were only 2% of respondents who accessed the wiki from other places – these were on their placement and from internet cafes.

5.2 Activities & Tasks

This section sought to explore how respondents approached the collaborative tasks and activities that each Virtual School was asked to undertake.

Some learners prefer collaborative working whilst others prefer to work alone. For some, the nature of the task or activity may influence their preference. What are your preferences?

I mainly prefer to work alone
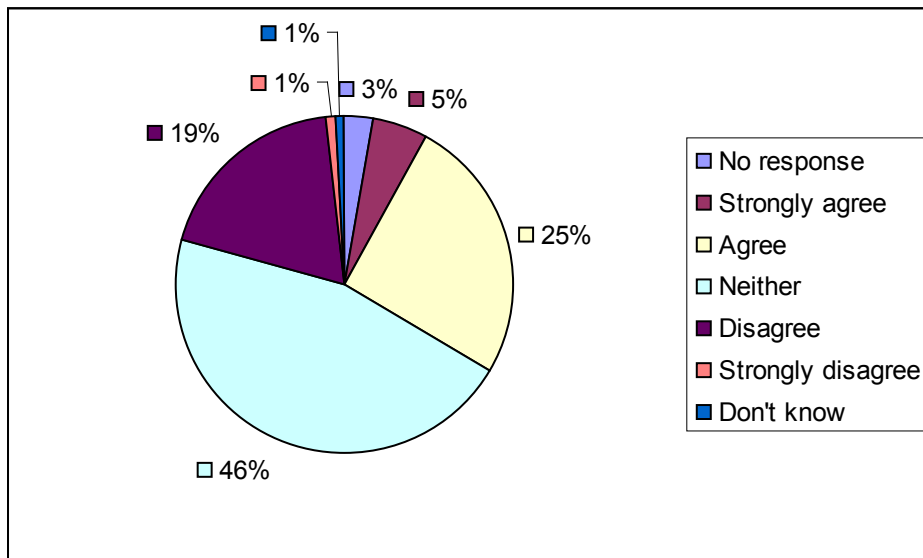
From these responses it is clear that a significant minority (46%) has no preference of working alone (versus with a group), although a total of 30% said that they did prefer to work alone. Only 19% prefer not to work alone i.e. in a group.
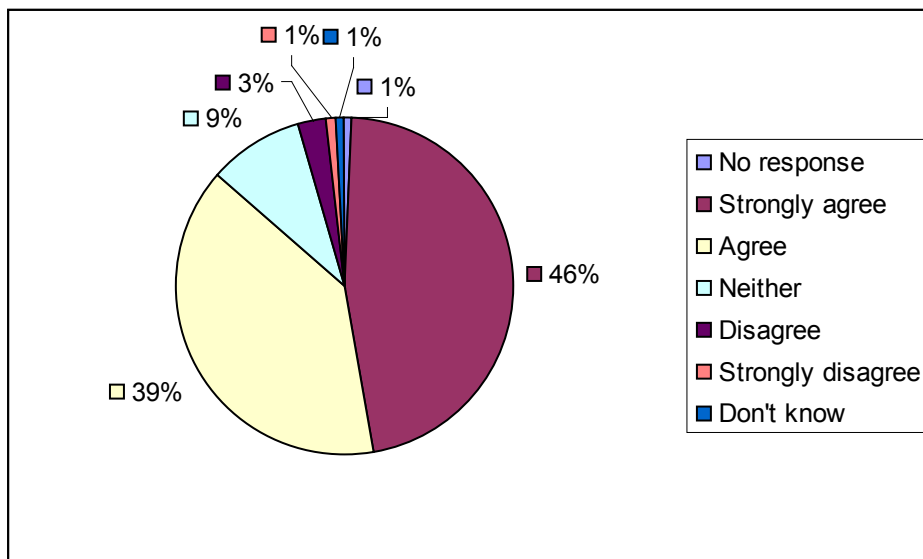
I mainly prefer to work in a group
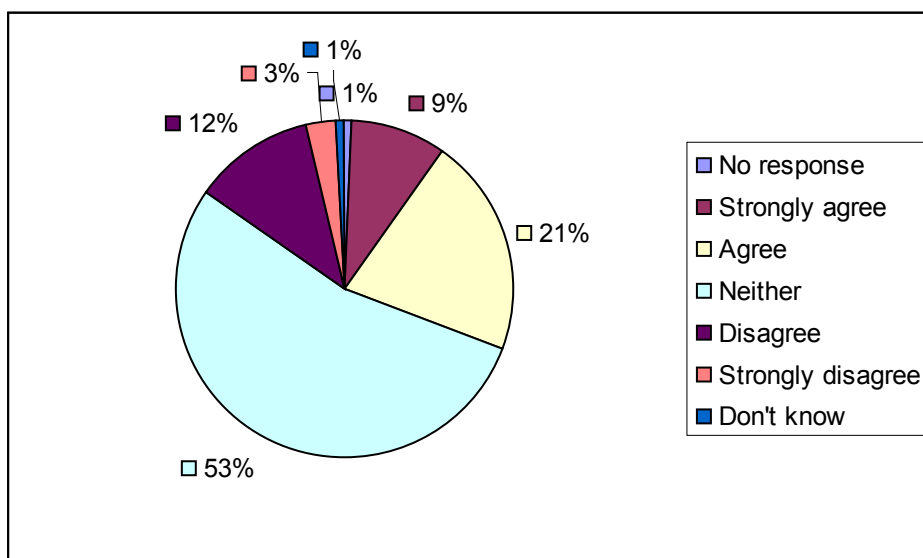
When asked in respondents prefer to work in a group it is clear that there is a discrepancy between the responses for these two questions. The last question indicated that 19% prefer

not to work alone, however when asked if they prefer to work in a group, 30% said that they did so.

My preference depends on the nature of the task

Here, the responses to group versus individual work being dependent on the nature of the task are clearer. The vast majority of respondents (85%) agree to some extent that their preferences around group work are dependent on the particularities of the tasks.

How did your Virtual School approach the activities and tasks assigned to date?

Overall the comments made here indicated that roles and tasks were assigned on the basis of both experience and willingness or interest in a particular subject.

> *Brainstormed on how best to do work. Sometimes team members were assigned roles based on expertise and on willingness to undertake tasks.*

> *The team members were sometimes assigned roles and responsibilities according to their expertise or willingness to undertake the task.*

> *In our school we tried to divide the work amongst the team members. Each members of the team choose the topic which fit them and felt comfortable with.*

Some negative comments were made indicating that for some groups the collaboration did not go smoothly and that responsibility and workload was uneven.

> *Some tasks were divided up but mainly it ended up being the same 4 or 5 who did all the work.*

> *Some members of the group actively refused to take part. In truth this attitude made me lose interest in the long run.*

> *I feel there was a lack of responsibility from some. Many members have not been particularly verbal or willing to work as a team, and have not contributed much at all. There is a complete lack of enthusiasm for tasks.*

> *Depended on members being present @ meetings + their verbal participation. Usually people would step forward and take on a responsibility, but I don't agree that was fair as some members consistently had nothing to prepare/write up.*

Alongside this, some groups had members who dominated the process.

> *2 people in the group took it upon themselves to be 'bosses' and try to dominate the group-it was very hard for anyone else to contribute in meetings as when the 2 in question didn't agree they'd move the discussion on and almost shout the others down.*

> *There seemed to be prejudice against subjects & opinions at the start as there were some very strong figures within the group.*

> *It was very disorganised with the most vocal members getting landed with all the work.*

Comments also indicate that this was necessary in some instances.

> *I tended to take the lead in the group as nothing was getting done. Everyone was very vocal in discussion and tasks were done as a group. But for anything to go on the wiki I had to take control and send out reminders.*

Overall however, most of the comments made were positive about the group work.

> *Work was divided amongst team members during meetings held. This was sometimes done via emails. Initially, work was assigned based on department e.g. PE or DTT. Then this got more general for individuals input. Teamwork was very good and on the basis of willingness and expertise.*

> *We divided the work fairly such as choosing one topic each and posting our ideas on the wiki. We all had assigned roles and according to the roles we worked on the tasks. For example, I was in charge of KS3 and worked most about the topics 'Transition from KS2-KS3' and 'Preparing to receive an EAL student in KS3'*

> *Team members were assigned roles and responsibilities so that everybody cooperated.*

Other ways that work was managed was with the introduction of a head teacher who oversaw the process.

> *Assigned a head teacher who would assign tasks to specialist members. Some team members were assigned roles and took responsibility. More based on willingness to take part.*

> *We had a head teacher in our school who allocated the tasks.*

Finally, it seems that the successful division of group work was enabled by the face to face meetings on campus.

> *Some people in the group were more willing to take part, so mostly it was up to the individual to use what they wanted to do. When we were given time in university to sort out tasks then it was easier to split.*

> *We decided during our university sessions what to do and how to do it.*

How did you and your Virtual School benefit from being able to view other VS Wikis?

There was a great difference in how often individuals looked at other Wikis. Some looked every time they logged on, however not all individuals looked at other Wikis at all. Some of the reasons for not (often) looking at other Wikis included:

> *Hardly ever looked at other VS wikis-wanted to try and think of ideas for myself.*

> *For the design aspect we looked at others, but generally speaking we didn't visit others much.*

I did not spend that much time looking at the other schools as I just did what I had to do on our site and logged out.

For many of those who did not regularly look at other Wikis (and these were in the minority), lack of time was cited as the main reason.

I did not look to other VS as I was more concentrated on my VS to try to get things done.

Rarely. I didn't pay too much attention to the other schools. Too much subject work to complete before extras like this could be considered.

Time was spent researching tasks, attempting to encourage teamwork and participation and contributing to site, not reading other sites

However, those who did look at other Wikis gained a number of benefits from this in terms of ideas, inspiration and comparing standards of the work across the programme. Most of the comments indicated that participants benefited from looking at others Wikis and that they did so regularly.

I viewed VS Wiki very often and I checked other schools in order to find out the standard of their writing. Such standards influenced my own development of my VS Wiki.

When in doubt about what we were doing and unsure about how much work we should have done the wiki gave an insight into others' work and how much they did.

I have always checked other VSs' pages, to get a good model of good work and to learn myself. I think that having the possibility to look at other schools' pages is really useful and worthwhile.

I often looked at other VS wikis every time I logged on to VS Wiki to get an idea of what kind of work they were producing. I think that the sharing ideas and information had a positive effect on my own learning.

We kept an eye on other VS wikis - the content of other wikis did inspire and motivate us. We definitely benefited from being able to view and access other wikis.

I have benefited from looking at others' wikis, as a way of motivating me to make better contributions i.e. some schools raised the bar, good to see how others approached same task.

In fact even those who did not look at other Wikis very often still admitted that this was a useful thing to do.

Not often to be honest. <u>BUT</u> the few times that I was able to look at other VS I found it really helpful and it gave me an idea of how I can handle/do my tasks.

Didn't look very often at other wikis, or spend much time reading them, therefore there was no impact on my own learning. The design &content did benefit by being able to view the other sites.

How did the composition of the group influence your approach and the contribution made by your group?

A slight majority of the comments praised this way of working, and many participants learned from and gained new insights from the cross curricula mixing.

It has been great and beneficial to work with students (teachers) from other subjects, as their view and ideas about teaching were often very different.

Working with colleagues from different academic subjects is very interesting and challenging as well. Also, it's help you to see different points of view. We share our experience from the placement, problems etc.

> *By far the best thing about the virtual group was the social interaction with those from different disciplines.*

> *I gained a lot of insight into how other subject trainees were experiencing their training and problems they were coming across. It also helped in making new friends and feeling like part of a bigger group.*

Many specific subject approaches and skills seem to have been shared between participants when the collaboration within the group was successful.

> *Working with ICT and English colleagues helped me to think of ways I can teach my RE lessons i.e. Using IT and improving literacy within RE.*

> *It has been helpful seeing how different subjects approach teaching and it has given us the chance to exchange tips and ideas. E.g. English trainees helped science trainees with how to design easy but understandable slideshows with correct use of language. Drama trainees gave me ideas on ways/tasks which would engage students in my lessons, e.g. role play, hot seating etc.*

> *One of the benefits, however, was that of the excellent use of language by the English Teacher Trainees. For me English is a second language*

> *I think that the VS is a great idea, and at the beginning I was really keen on it. Then to be honest my enthusiasm has decreased a bit because I realised that we were just a few in my VS who cared for it. I have learned a lot from my "colleagues" from ICT, D&T, MFL & Science but the English & Maths group did not participate at all to the discussions and the tasks we had.*

Others' experiences were not so positive. However oftentimes this was seen to be due to personality rather than coming from a different subject area.

> *I found there was a lack of communication and difficult for all of our groups to get involved. I found a lot of confusion & lack of understanding. Also there are certain members that decided to do all the work & not let other contribute and took their ideas.*

> *Some people were unwilling to put in any contribution and this affected the group. Certain people were unpopular due to their attitudes towards the tasks, ideas and general project, and this caused us not to work well as a group.*

> *Personally, I haven't enjoyed the wiki experience much. Meetings were difficult to arrange, decisions difficult to make and contributions often came from the same people all the times. Their shortcomings became worse when we started our placement, as we had little or no chance to meet up in person.*

Although there were some conflicts, despite these many participants still valued the experience.

> *It was good to work as a (mixed curricula) VS as it gave greater insight into being a teacher in general as opposed to a subject teacher. There were often conflicts; the group often had a split down the middle. Strangely, some people that were vocal in face to face meetings did not contribute anything on the wiki!*

> *Working with students from other disciplines has been excellent. Attempting to work with those lacking in enthusiasm and commitment is frustrating. Ultimately, just a few individuals took on the responsibility, making for a much less enjoyable experience than it should have been.*

> *It was interesting to meet colleagues from different disciplines who often had different views from my own. There were no challenges as far as different subjects were concerned - however there were conflicts mainly due to personality. Two or three of the group were extroverts who often dominated the group - we solved this by letting them get on with it!*

There were a few participants who thought that working in groups which were solely from one subject area would have benefited them more.

It made it quite simple to gain a variety of views and opinions on subjects, but I feel that in my own subject area, the students would have also had a variety of answers to give. If it consisted of people only from our own subject, I think that it would be far better as the group would have a better dynamic/like-minded people.

I have not gained anything from working in a cross-curricular group because we did not spend time with each other as friends, I have only gained more from the course activities as a whole whilst in VS's, but feel I could have gained the same knowledge if we were in subject groups and it may have been more competitive.

Working within the same academic subject would have been more useful because we could have shared more aspects.

Many comments pointed to the reality in schools that they will have to work with colleagues from other subject areas, and appreciated the cross curricula group work for the insights it gave them into this way of working.

It has been excellent working in a cross-curricula group so that we can share experiences with people outside of our own subject group. I got ideas from these people on what I might do in school to help my teaching + learning that maybe hadn't been discussed in the subject group.

When I went to my 1st placement I realise that working with VS wiki help me a lot to be flexible and tolerant towards some colleagues at school.

Since I worked in a real school, I realised that there are not very many opportunities to share ideas with colleagues from different curricula. It is beneficial to me to know what other subjects are doing to the same pupils I am teaching too. It promotes my understanding of the whole school life of the pupils.

It was very nice to see friendly faces from other disciplines. It reflects more the general staff in a proper school and gave good experience in coming to harmonious decisions.

Despite the numerous conflicts that occurred through the group work, many participants outlined how they dealt with the conflicts that arose.

When the group experienced conflict we used a voting system.

We learned earlier on to listen and respect whatever contribution made even if I am not to agree with it/them.

Conflict was resolved by negotiation or failing that, time - the emphasis was largely on completing the task to enable an early exit

Different personalities - some dominated and wanted to take lead. I didn't have issues with that but when sharing ideas there were some problems. But it was overcome by discussing & agreeing.

And sometimes the comments outlined that the conflicts were not resolved, resulting in a less than satisfactory experience for some participants.

Being forced to work in a team with completely different work ethics hasn't been fun! Nothing has been resolved; those that are willing just get on with it.

Many members weren't taking part in the group and this was noted and people were spoken to but nothing changed. It was always the same for people doing the work and showing up for meetings and lectures, therefore, the whole VS idea was pretty useless, time consuming and of no help at all.

I haven't gained much. Our interests are very different and really we barely have the time to consider working together better. Conflicts (if any) were not focused on or resolved.

Frustration. It has been a great challenge to come to any sort of conclusion on a given topic. Some members were trying to dominate but in the end did not deliver. Others did not take part at all. It seemed as if very few and the same people were contributing. I don't think we created anything useful.
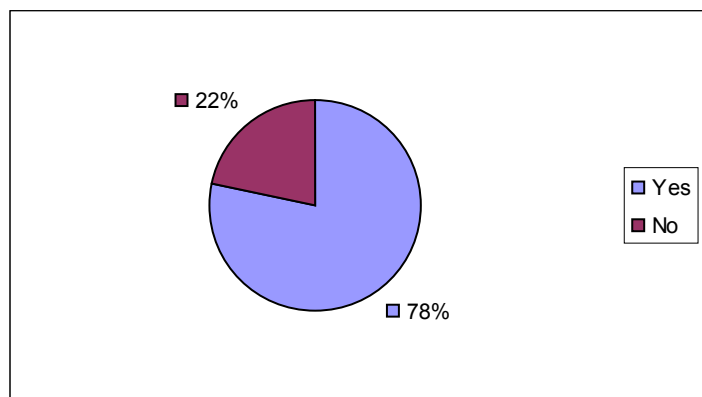
Thinking about the four activities and tasks you have been asked to undertake to date, which activities have you contributed to?

It was clear from the responses below that the majority of respondents contributed to the Transition (74%), SEN (78%), and EAL (81%) activities.

Transition
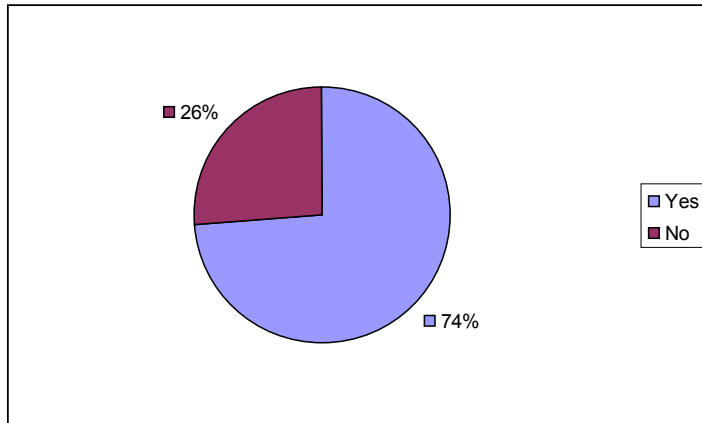
SEN

EAL
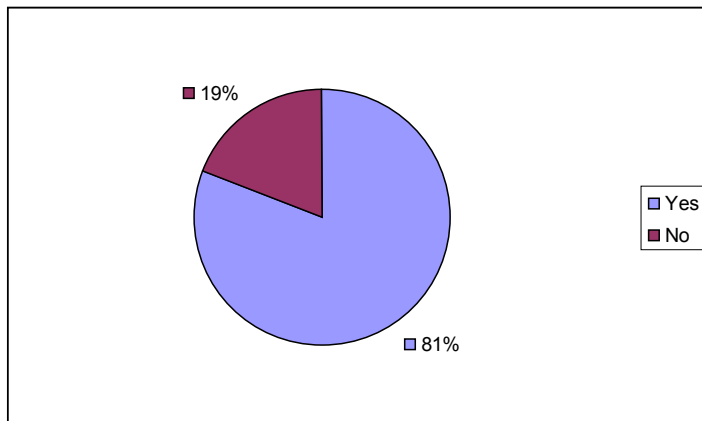
However, in contrast with this, only 28% contributed to the anti-bullying component.

Anti-bullying
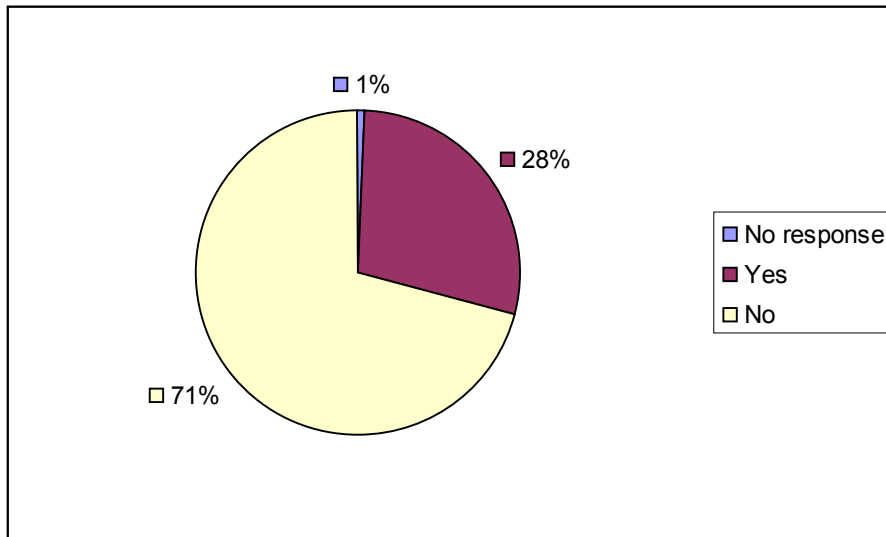
### *Thinking about the face-to-face sessions (staff meetings), how would you describe your contribution?*

I contributed more than other members of the group.
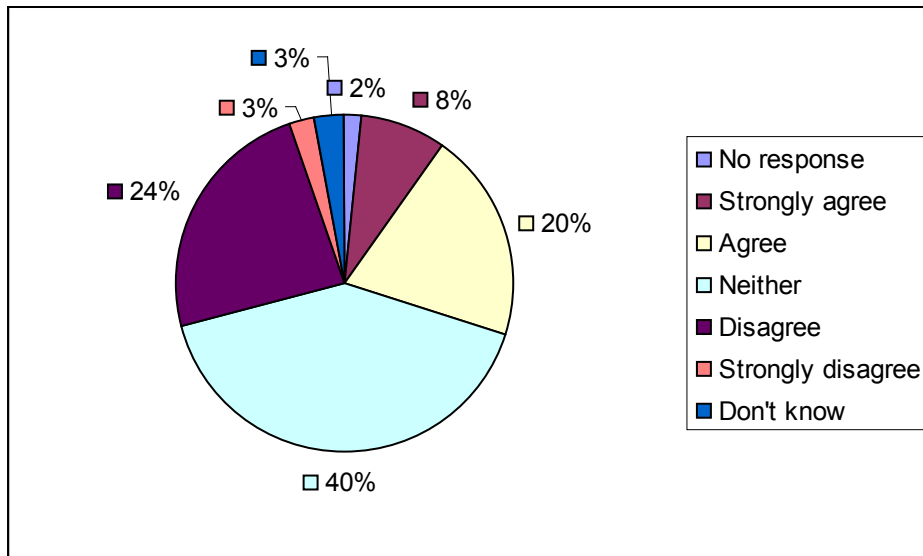
Here 28% of respondents felt that they contributed more than other members of their group to the face to face meetings, while 27% felt that they did not. A total of 40% of respondents felt that they neither contributed more, nor less than others in their group.

b)

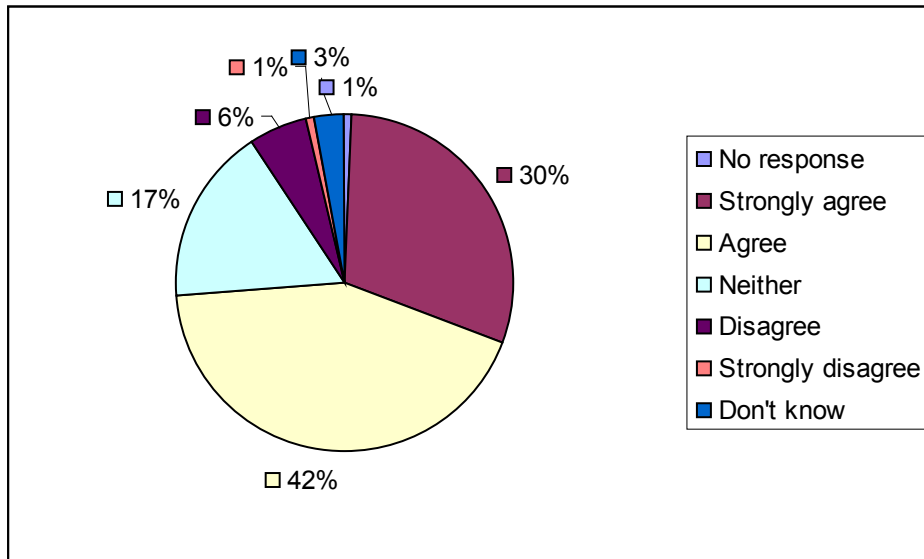*I contributed as much as other members of the group.*
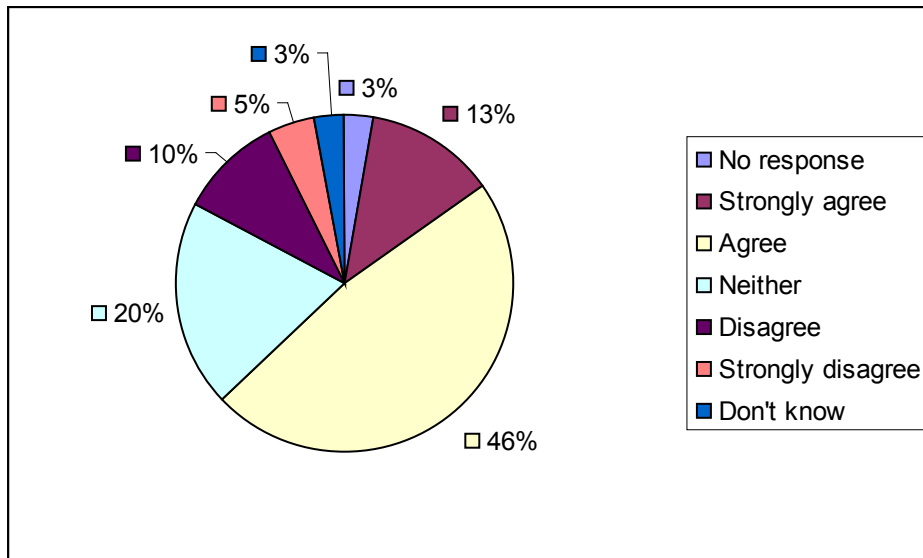
With regards to the contribution made by respondents to the face to face meetings, a majority of respondents (59%) felt that they contributed as much as other members of the group. A total of 20% neither agreed, nor disagreed, and 15% disagreed that they contributed as much as the others.

I contributed less than other members of the group.
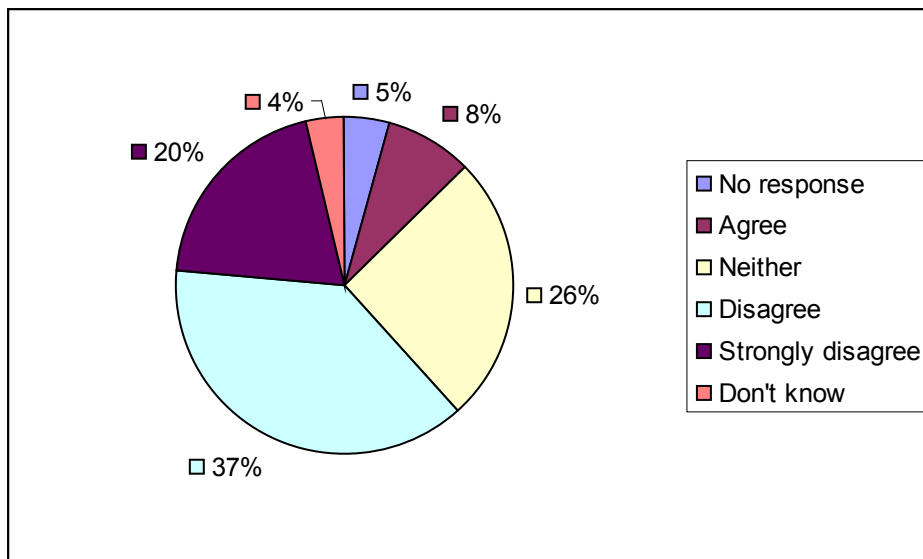
Again when looking at the contribution made during the face to face meetings, an honest 8% felt that they did not contribute as much as their peers, and 57% felt that they did not contribute less, echoing the last result (question b, above) of 59% who felt that they did contribute as much as the others.

It provided the opportunity to discuss issues with other members of the group.

The majority of respondents (72%) felt that the face to face meetings encouraged discussion with the other members of the group. Only 7% disagreed that this was the case.

*Thinking about your online activity on the VS Wiki, how would you describe your participation / contribution?*

I contributed more than other members of the group.
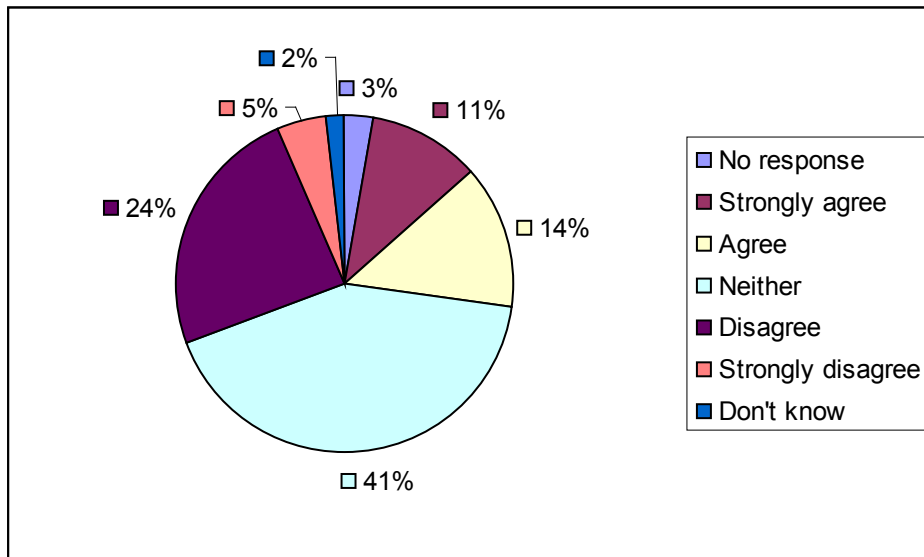
When looking at the contribution made by respondents to the online activity of the VS wiki, 25% felt that they contributed more than the others, while 29% felt that they did not. A total of 41% felt that they neither contributed more, nor less than others in the group. These percentages closely echo those numbers from the enquiry into face to face contributions above, which were 28%, 27% and 40% respectively. From examining a cross tabulation, the small discrepancies are mostly due to those who replied that they did not know for one or the other questions.

### I contributed as much as other members of the group.
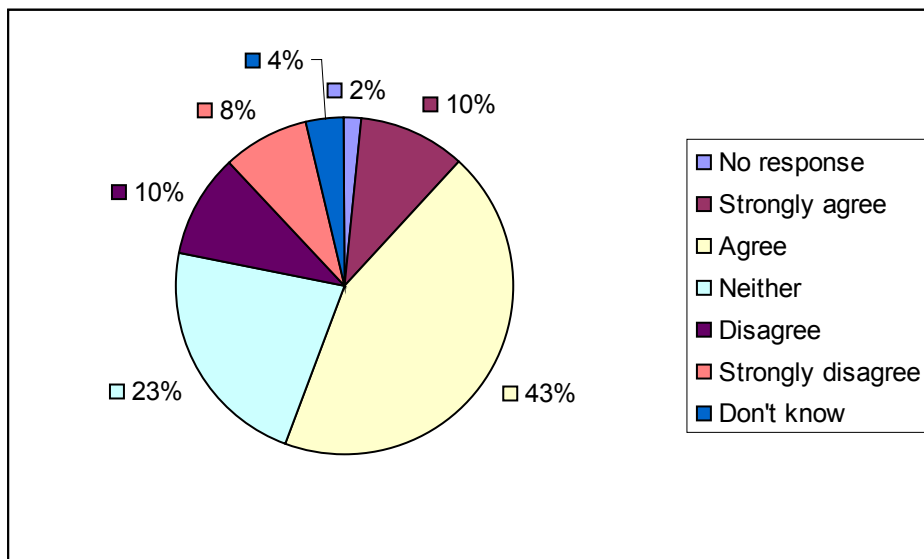
When looking at the contributions made to the online activities, 53% of respondents felt that they contributed as much as their peers; 23% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 18% disagreed that they contributed as much as the others. Again there is a correlation between this question and the same question around contribution to the face to face activity. For that question the percentages were 59% feeling that they contributed as much, 20% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 15% felt that they did not contribute as much.

### I contributed less than other members of the group.
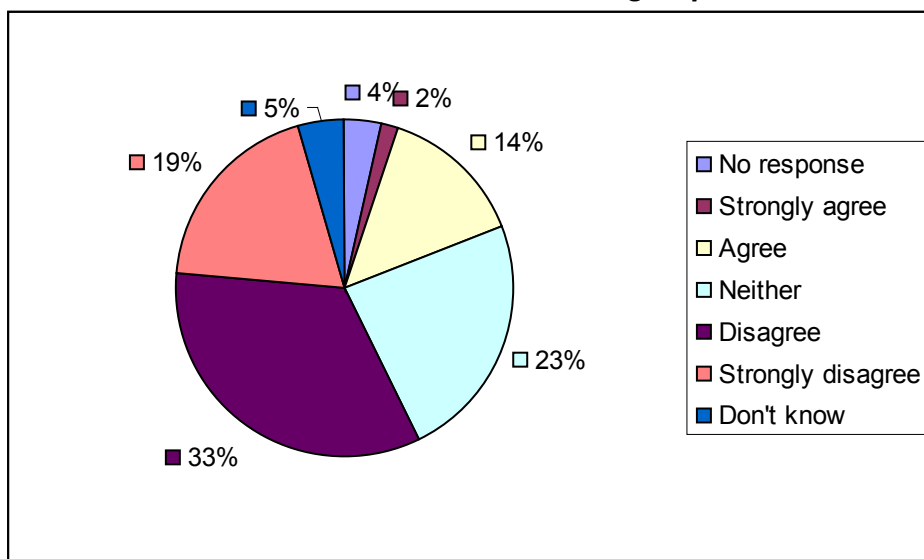
With this question about online contributions, there is less of a correlation with the same question about face to face contribution, than the correlation between the last series of questions. In this instance 16% of respondents felt that they contributed less to the online wiki (as compared with 8% who felt that they contributed less to the face to face meetings). A total of 52% here felt that they did not contribute less than others to the online activity.

It provided the opportunity to discuss issues with other members of the group.
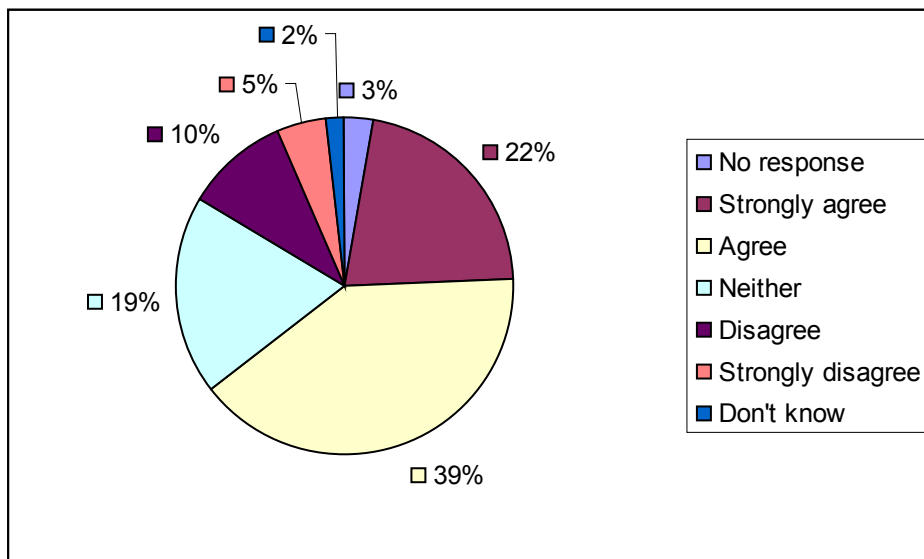

With regard to the online activity encouraging discussion with other members of the group, the majority of respondents (61%) felt that this activity did encourage discussion. However this was not as high as the percentage who felt that the face to face meetings encouraged discussion, which was 72%. In terms of the online activity, 15% disagreed that this encouraged debate.

How would you rate feedback from teaching staff posted on the VS Wiki in response to the activities and tasks undertaken by your Virtual School?
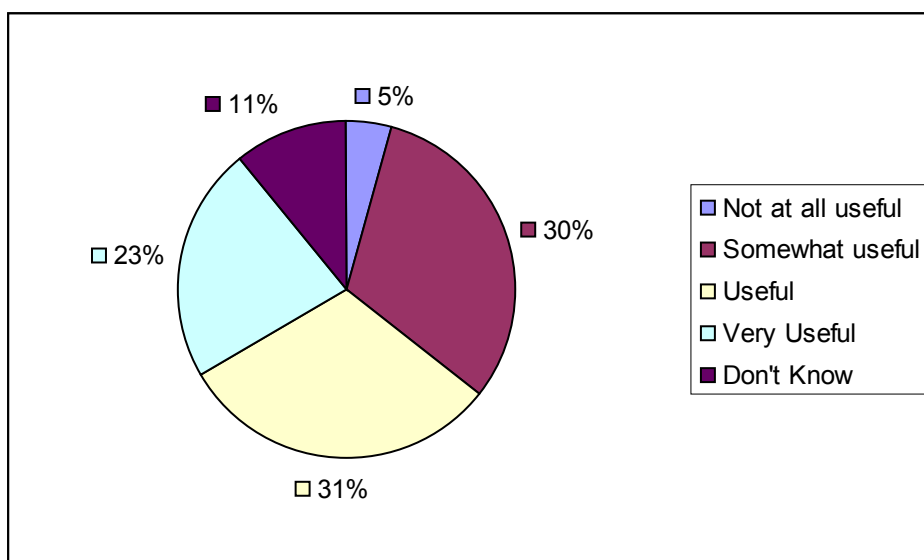

When examining the usefulness of feedback from teaching staff posted on the wiki, the respondents are roughly in agreement that this feedback was useful (84%). Only 5% did not find this feedback useful at all.

Did you amend colleagues' contributions?
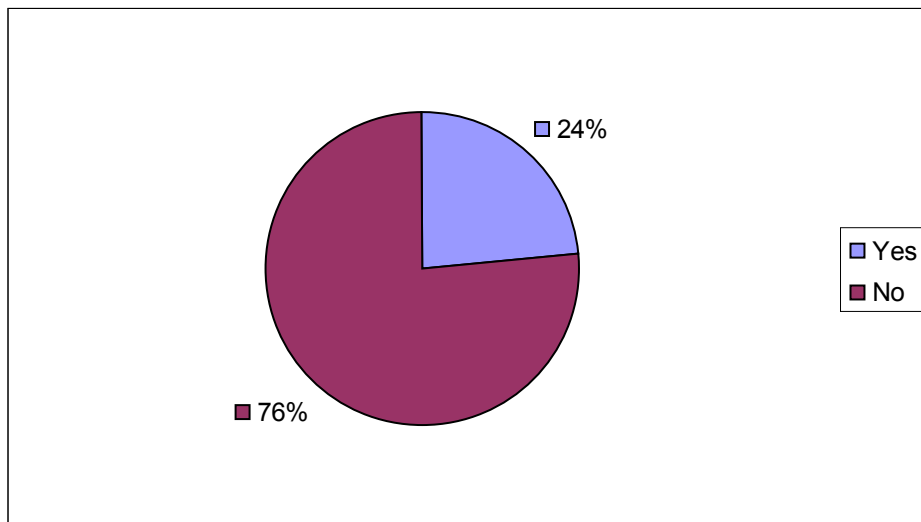
Approximately three quarters of the respondents did not edit or amend their colleagues contributions on the VS wiki. This is reinforced by the qualitative responses in section 2.11 (below) where many expressed their discomfort in doing so.

Did colleagues edit your contributions?
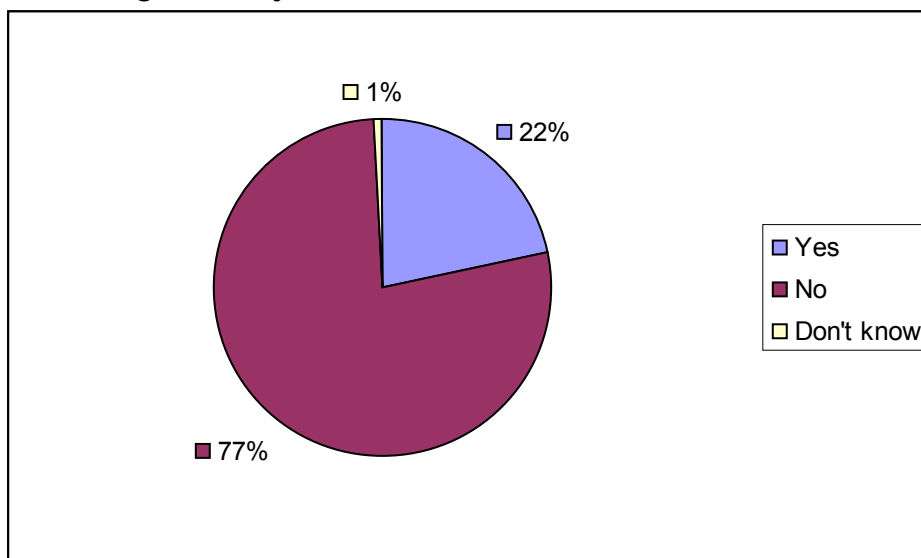
Again, this shows that the majority of respondents did not engage with editing tasks. To explain this further, the qualitative responses to the question about editing can be seen below.

Tell us some more about contributing and editing. For example – Did you have any concerns about editing other peoples work?

Many participants stated that they were not comfortable with the idea of editing other's work.

I was afraid to edit other people's contributions.

I felt a bit scared and worried although I had the permission of my colleague - however I constantly liaised with him while making the changes.

I didn't think it would be a good idea to interface with other peoples work, and try to edit them. Therefore, I only edited my own work.

It felt difficult to edit others work, even for spelling mistakes, as it felt like a personal critique.

I did not feel it was right to edit other peoples work.

It is rude to amend any contribution but your own. It's easy to wait and sort it out @ a VS meeting or just drop and email with a suggestion.

However, there was more confidence in editing format, and spelling, rather than content of others' work.

Yes I feel concerned. But that was corrections like spelling check which I know will not make them feel bad.

I think I just edited spelling etc and not the content. I don't think it's fair to do that. I would write a comment to see if we could edit

The stuff I amended was only spelling and grammar.

Work that was edited was only to make the wiki look more appealing. Direct contribution of information was left untouched.

Also, there were also concerns around accidently deleting others' work.

Always afraid to delete everything by pressing the wrong key.

Yes. Concerns about losing someone's work when editing and also how that person would feel.

I did not feel happy to edit other peoples work in case I deleted it.

Not everyone felt this discomfort when editing others' work, and some saw the benefits to this way of working. Alongside this some groups had clear agreements regarding the editing process.

I think editing was beneficial as others in the group could extend ideas and understanding from what I had put down as the ground work. It gave others the opportunity to give their input.

All was done with complete agreement from the outset that we would agree to have our contribution edited as well as the freedom to improve others contributions.

In my group people's contribution were not edited without permission. We only added onto extend tasks etc. for the benefit of the group.

No concerns about editing other peoples work because everything was previously agreed in the group.

I like to give comments on other peoples work, just so that maybe they can think about it.

How did you feel when your work was edited?

Some comments indicated that individuals did not have a problem when their work was edited.

> *I felt quite comfortable when other people edited my work, because I am not very good in ICT, typing etc.*

> *I did not mind if my work was edited as it improved the quality of the site.*

> *When mine was edited for a good reason I didn't mind.*

> *Because we work as a team it does not hurt me at all if someone edits my ideas in a particular subject*

> *I am free and happy with my writing edited by others because it promotes actual conversation. It is easy in the virtual space to be one-sided. (I talk and nobody responds.)*

Some comments centred on the frustration felt when their contributions were heavily edited or deleted.

> *I felt the work I did was a valid contribution however someone kept deleting it and feel that members should communicate clearly and allow others to contribute.*

> *I was upset when I couldn't find my contribution but I think that it can happen when one is not good at ICT.*

With both editing other's work and having one's work edited by others – consent and permission was important to a number of participants.

> *I think editing other members work is permissible with consent.*

> *I would have been outraged if someone had edited my work if they hadn't have consulted me first- and I would <u>never</u> edit anyone else's work without their permission.*

> *In my group people's contribution were not edited without permission.*

> *Before I edited any work done by others, I consulted the person first before making any amendment or asking others to implement the task/work.*

A few comments pointed to other problems with working in a virtual, collaborative environment.

> *It became destructive after I contributed other peoples' work and they then highlighted all my amendments to disassociate them from the contributions instead of having a collaborative document.*

> *I did not appreciate when I had written a vast quantity about the VS site visit and one of the other members had added a few words to my work - put his name next to mine. I would have appreciated him asking me and I would not have said 'no'. Because in this way I felt he has taken the same amount of credit for my hard work.*

How do you feel about other group members who don't contribute to the wiki?

Many comments centred on the problems experienced where it was often felt that many participants did not do their share of the work.

> *I think the wiki could work well if everyone contributes but this did not always happen.*

I feel disappointed when other members do not contribute to the wiki, and feel that it lets other members of the group down who do contribute.

For those group members who didn't contribute to the wiki it annoyed me as I was taking the time to add my contributions but they were still getting praise as we were doing it collectively.

People who choose not to contribute will realise later on that they missed a fantastic opportunity to evidence some Q's.

I understand time is an issue but we need to delegate work and complete tasks we've been asked to do. In the end I had the attitude of 'why should I always end up taking the lead?'

It was frustrating that there were about 5 of us that ended up doing the majority of the work + wanting to do something well, and the rest it was pot luck if they would even turn up. I didn't even recognise about half of the group.

However, others did not mind that a number of people did not contribute as much as others.

When group members didn't contribute to the wiki that was ok because everyone contributed to discussions.

I didn't mind if people didn't contribute as I am aware how busy they are.

Re: people that don't/didn't contribute - it wasn't so much an issue as everyone contributed in some shape or other.

Some people were clearly not bothered by wiki, but this did not affect me.

5.3 Developing Virtual Schools and VS Wiki

This section sought to ascertain respondents' views on how the VS Wiki could be developed for future cohorts.

Would it be useful / helpful to provide a Virtual Schools' Handbook with guidance and templates?
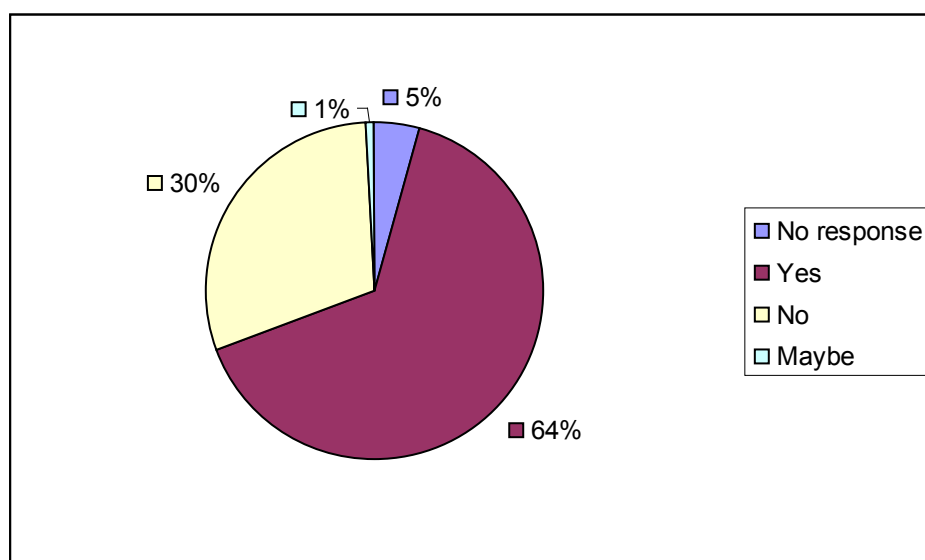
When questioned about the use of a handbook including guidance and templates to assist with the VS wiki projects, a clear majority (64%) said that they would find this helpful. However, many more qualitative comments were made about this; for these please see the section below.

Why do you say that?

The comments around handbooks varied wildly from those who stated that they were not good at ICT (and thus felt that this would be useful) to those who thought a virtual handbook, or online tutorial would be better, to those who felt the wiki was easy to use and would not find a handbook useful at all.

The comments made by those who thought an offline handbook would be of use included:

> *It would be a useful place to make notes and provide guidance for those who aren't sure of what they're doing and have nobody to speak to.*

> *Because I have some IT issues. Not with navigation, but creating new links etc.*

> *It will be very helpful for people who are not very good in ICT.*

> *New technology for me, only gained confidence to use it because of ICT guys in V.S. helped.*

> *It would help people who are not that confident with ICT*

Others felt a handbook would be of use to save time, as some were new to the concept of a wiki and felt that the handbook would clarify particular tasks.

> *We were all totally lost at the start, as guidance seemed vague. It all makes sense now but when you are new to this technology it is very bizarre in concept.*

> *Didn't know wiki before. Took a while to be familiar with.*

> *Possibly to get people started as it was quite unclear as to the purpose of the exercise.*

> *Introductory information on its uses and importance and benefits of use*

> *Because especially at the beginning we experienced problems accessing the site. On top of that there were different views on the sort of contributions we should make.*

> *Just information about expectations of using wiki and that it is part of the training programme.*

> *Yes we would have liked a handbook, because time is so limited due to placement, I would have liked a more prescriptive approach*

On the other hand there were many comments stating that the wiki was very easy to use, so that there was no need for a handbook.

> *It was quite easy and straight forward, a guide its not really needed, I think*

> *The UEL virtual wiki is straight forward. Any person training to be a teacher should be capable of using ICT*

> *Wiki is easy to use so no example needed*

> *I don't think it needs one - self explanatory.*

> *I think it was well presented already.*

> *It is fairly easy to use*

Other comments acknowledged the need for some additional information; however they felt that a hard copy handbook was not needed.

Wikis are quite straightforward to use. Maybe an online tutorial or/and a lecture on how to use it would be better.

Its fun to explore and play around on the wiki, rather than wasting paper. Besides, some people don't even go on the wiki.

*I struggled with the editing processes, and as such an online "how to" or FAQ would have helped.*

If not a handbook, a session to practice and ask questions as I had trouble pasting work online sometimes.

Should group work on the VS Wiki be formally assessed?
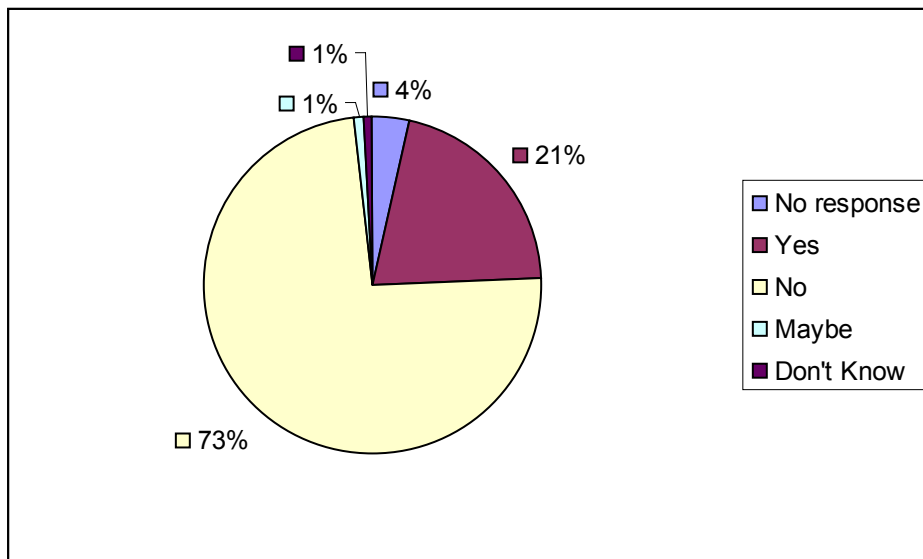
When asked about assessment it is clear that the majority (73%) do not want this work to be assessed.

If your work had been assessed, what would you prefer?
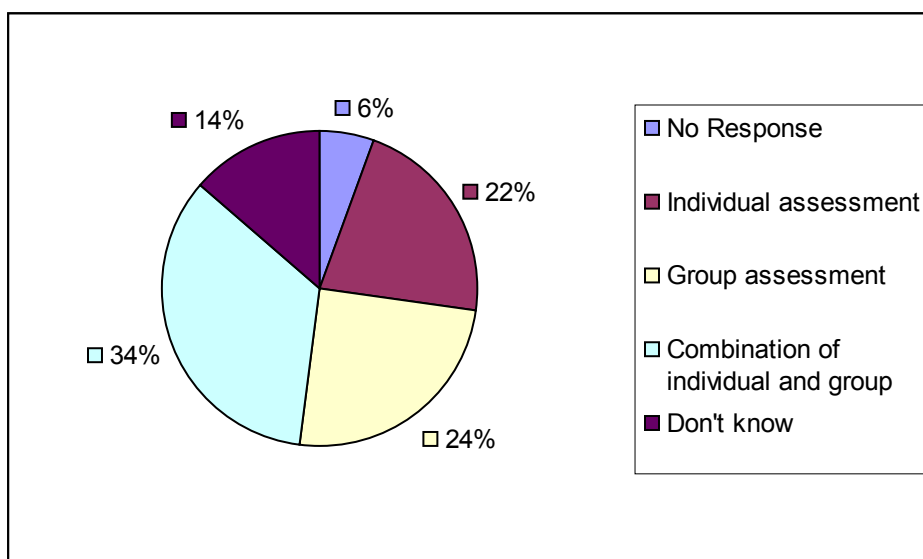
When asked what kind of assessment they would prefer if this work was assessed, the most popular response (34%) was that they would prefer a combination of individual and group

assessment, followed by group assessment (24%) and 22% preferring individual assessment.

Would your contribution to VS Wiki been different had it been formally assessed?
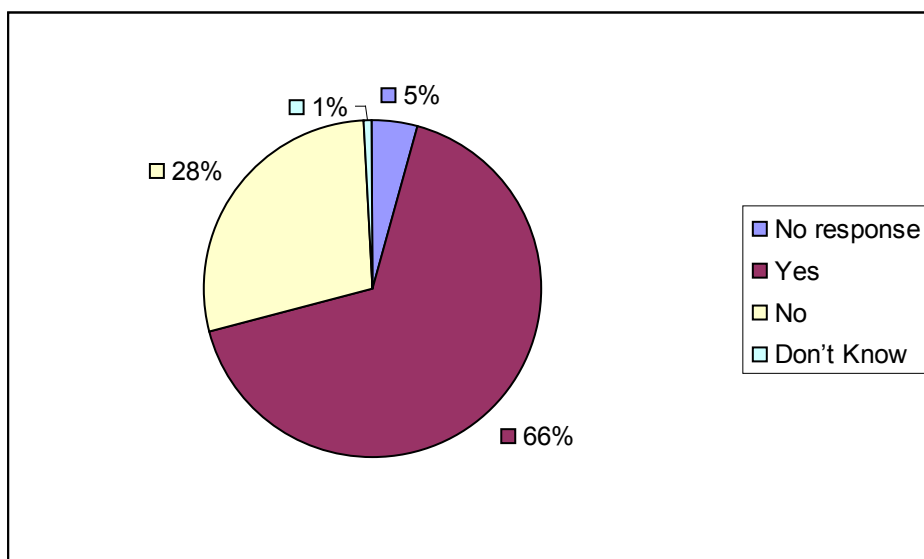
Although most did not want this work to be formally assessed, here it is clear that a majority of respondents (66%) felt that their contribution to the VS wiki would be different if it has been formally assessed (and presumably, that they would have contributed more – although this was not asked).

Based on the current tasks and activities what do you think about the time allocated to face-to face meetings (staff meetings) for the Virtual Schools?
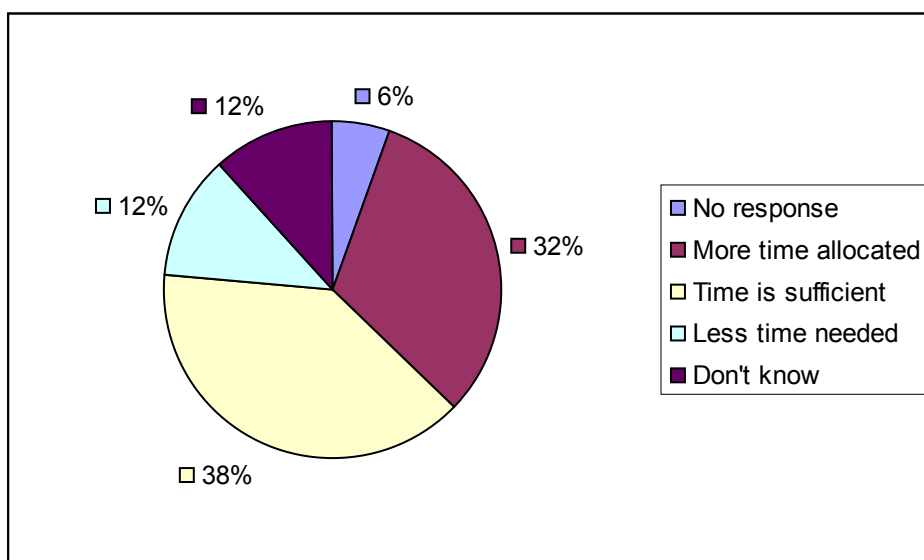
Here, the largest respondent group (38%) feels that the time allocation for face to face meetings for the Virtual Schools is sufficient. Only 32% feel that more time should be allocated, while 12% think that less time is needed.

What did you think about the features and functionality of the VS Wiki?

Most comments here stated that, for the most part, the wiki was easy to use.

The Sim City approach works amazingly well. The formal and informal information is featured on a specific tool bar which also works well.

I think all features were easy to use.

Features are great. I embedded an interaction introduction on the Mango UEL wiki page to promote engagement on the site. (Please watch with sound)

I only used the basic functions of adding text entries. It was quite straightforward.

Very good tool for communicate with people when face-to-face meeting is not possible

All features were fairly easy to use.

However there were some comments regarding particular specificities of the wiki.

Editing menu permission should be included so that you notify the author of a work what you have edited and why you edited it.

Difficult to log on, however once logged on very exciting to see other pages to scroll etc.

Make the webpage easier to remember. More navigation buttons.

Instant messaging would aid collaboration or a conference-style ability.

Its too easy to quickly delete others work. There should be a proper sign in so you know who last entered the site + edited, and whose work is who.

It was very difficult to add and align pictures. This can be improved upon.

Only had problems cutting and pasting from word sometimes.

I think a template for staff room, chat rooms and subject rooms would have been nice,
The navigation panels, site map could be clearer.

Editing/adding comments/work could be made easier.

Access to the wiki site. There should be a link on the UEL site. Each student should have their own passwords and only be able to access their own learning areas.

Its fine as it is. Maybe an increase in webspace to encourage integration of resources such as videos/flash files etc. Maybe an idea for future to encourage 'departments' in VS to upload lesson resources/plans.

Page creation is annoying as everybody can add a page 'willy-nilly'. Needs more structure and a designated page creator appointed.

Some felt that the aesthetics and look of the wiki could be improved.

The format - font to make it more visually exciting

Appearance could be improved.

Easy to use - improved Aesthetics.

And in contrast to earlier comments, a minority thought that the wiki was difficult to use, while others thought the whole concept a waste of time.

Was a little confusing I didn't follow everything.

A little pointless. I gained little to nothing from the VS Wiki.

Very difficult to use and very confusing. Too many links.

I feel it was pointless.

It needs to be more accessible and user friendly.

*It needs to be accessible from home. Needs to be more user friendly.*

The navigation panels, site map could be clearer.

Although some of the discussion was useful, I don't necessarily feel that there was any need to post the information on the wiki. A simpler methodology of having to do a presentation and feedback to the other groups would have been tighter and more effective.

5.4 Professional practice

In this section we wanted to ascertain how learning from the Virtual School will be taken forward into professional practice.

Have you used a wiki or any of the ideas generated through collaborative learning in the Virtual School in your school experience/placement?
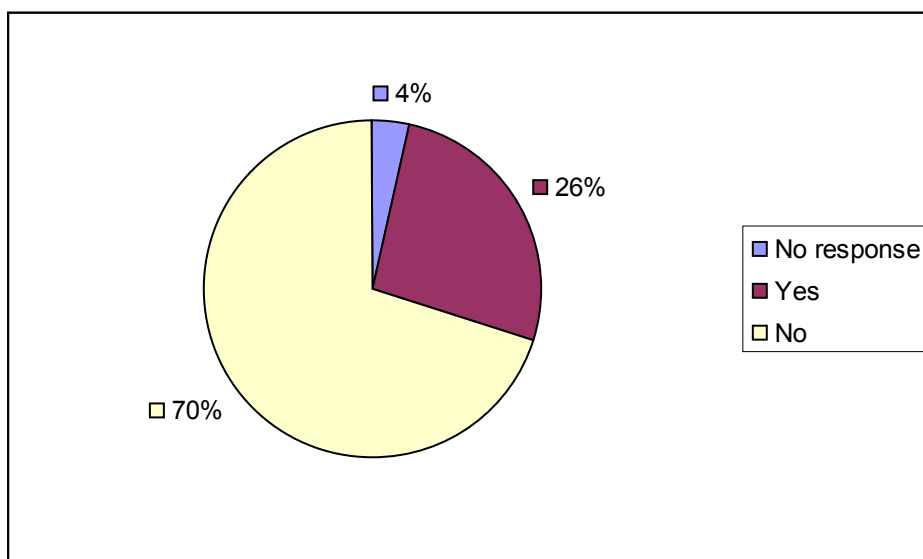
This question examined the usefulness of the ideas generated via the VS wiki to the placements at schools. Most (70%) felt that the wiki experience was not useful to the placement; however 26% did find this of use.

What is the likelihood that you will use a wiki in your professional practice?
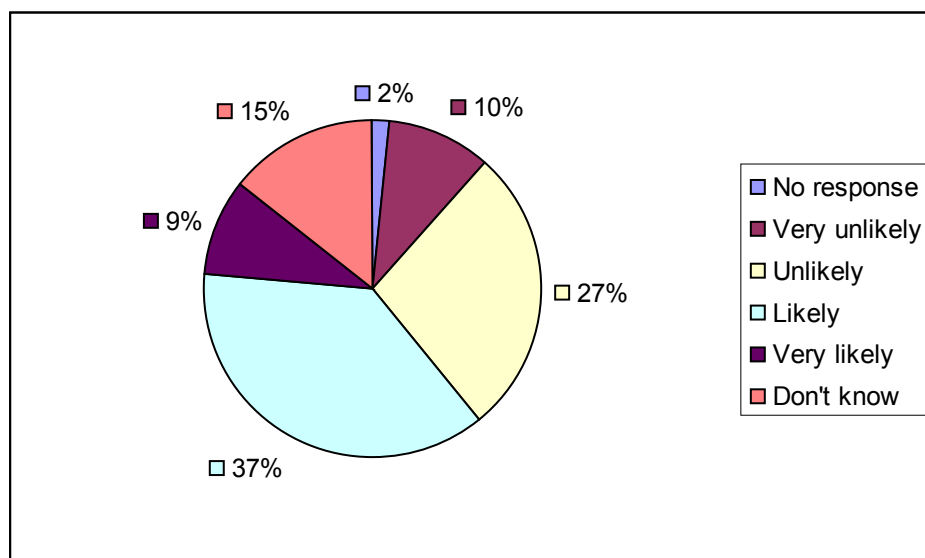
When asked about the likelihood of using wikis in future, 37% thought that this would be unlikely (or very unlikely), while 46% thought that it was likely that this would be the case.

Did the work in the Virtual Schools help to develop your ideas about teaching?
If so, how?

A minority of participant's feedback was negative about the VS project helping them to develop their ideas about teaching. Around 17 comments were negative about this, with a number of answers to this question simply being 'no'. Other comments outlined why the project did not help develop ideas about teaching.

Not used anything. The school experience is enough 'real' practice and felt the virtual school was an unnecessary added stress + workload. I understand and appreciate the innovative idea but don't feel I benefited from it whatsoever.

No, not really. It wasn't taken seriously, was additional work that wasn't necessary and took a back seat to other tasks that were much more relevant.

Not really, no. I think that we get the opportunity to work in groups when we are in schools on placement, and then it has a real result, which is worthwhile.

Not at all. I did not learn anything useful from VS wiki, that I can use in my placement school.

The majority of the comments were positive and outlined the ways in which the VS project helped participants to develop their ideas about teaching.

Was good to share ideas before school experience.

More confident about VS and opens up possibilities for use with pupils in SE.

Yes especially about SEN and EAN pupils, but unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to deal with these kinds of pupils in my SE.

Yes it provided and developed my ideas about teaching I started to make more use of E-learning in my lessons and in my own studying. It has developed my teaching skills in terms of using different teaching styles such as visual, kinaesthetic and oral.

I thought to my self a wiki would be a good thing to use as a teaching aid for homework etc…but this is heavily dependent on the limited time we have as professional teachers.

I have a resource that can be used for student work, a forum, for interaction/projects with foreign schools. Not sure what I might use a wiki for, but will no doubt come up with some great ideas at some point.

The university sessions have inspired my teaching & the school experience. I am thankful for all the University sessions as it made me feel more equipped to go to school experience.

The subject on SEN was quite useful to me as I had a year 7 group in transition - all of whom are SEN.

It was very useful to read other peoples opinions and reflections from the induction days and school placements.

It helped with EAL/SEN tasks and ideas when we all contributed then had a core session on it to reinforce the lesson/task.

It did develop my ideas as I can use it in my lessons - teaching groups to commemorate with pupils particularly on follow up issues involving homework or on project work.

Yes, it made me think about group e-learning. I am thinking of doing something like this for my students

I found the SEN and EAL particularly helpful. Because in my first placement I didn't have SEN or EAL in my class it will help with my next placement.


5.5 About you

In this section of the questionnaire we wanted to explore the relationship between the learner's background and their experience of the VS Wiki. Rather than ask respondents to complete more questions we asked permission to access individual's student data held on file at UEL. From 110 respondents 95 allowed us to access this data. We used the following categories from the student data: gender, age, ethnicity, where they received their first degree, what the subject of their first degree was, and whether they are an overseas, EU, or home student. This was then used to cross tabulate questionnaire responses, however we found that there was no correlation between these demographic categories and the questionnaire questions. This was surprising as we were particularly interested to see how previous subject studied would affect the use of the VS wikis. In particular we thought that there might have been a correlation between those respondents who had studied an ICT related subject, and how easy they found the use of the wiki. However, previous subject, ethnicity, gender, age, nor status as home or EU student had any affect on this. The demographic information on the respondents can be seen below.

The age range of the cohort that we questioned was from 22 to 57 years old, although 52% of the cohort was between 22 and 30.
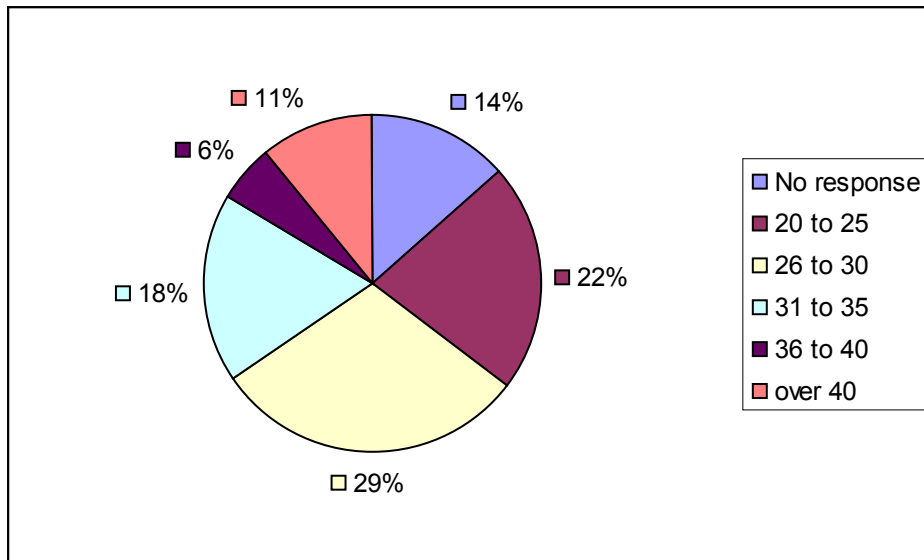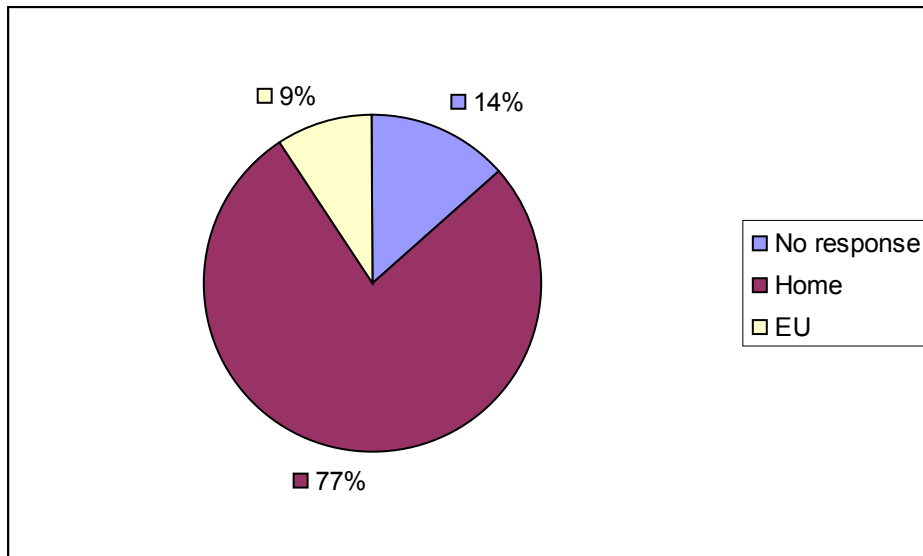

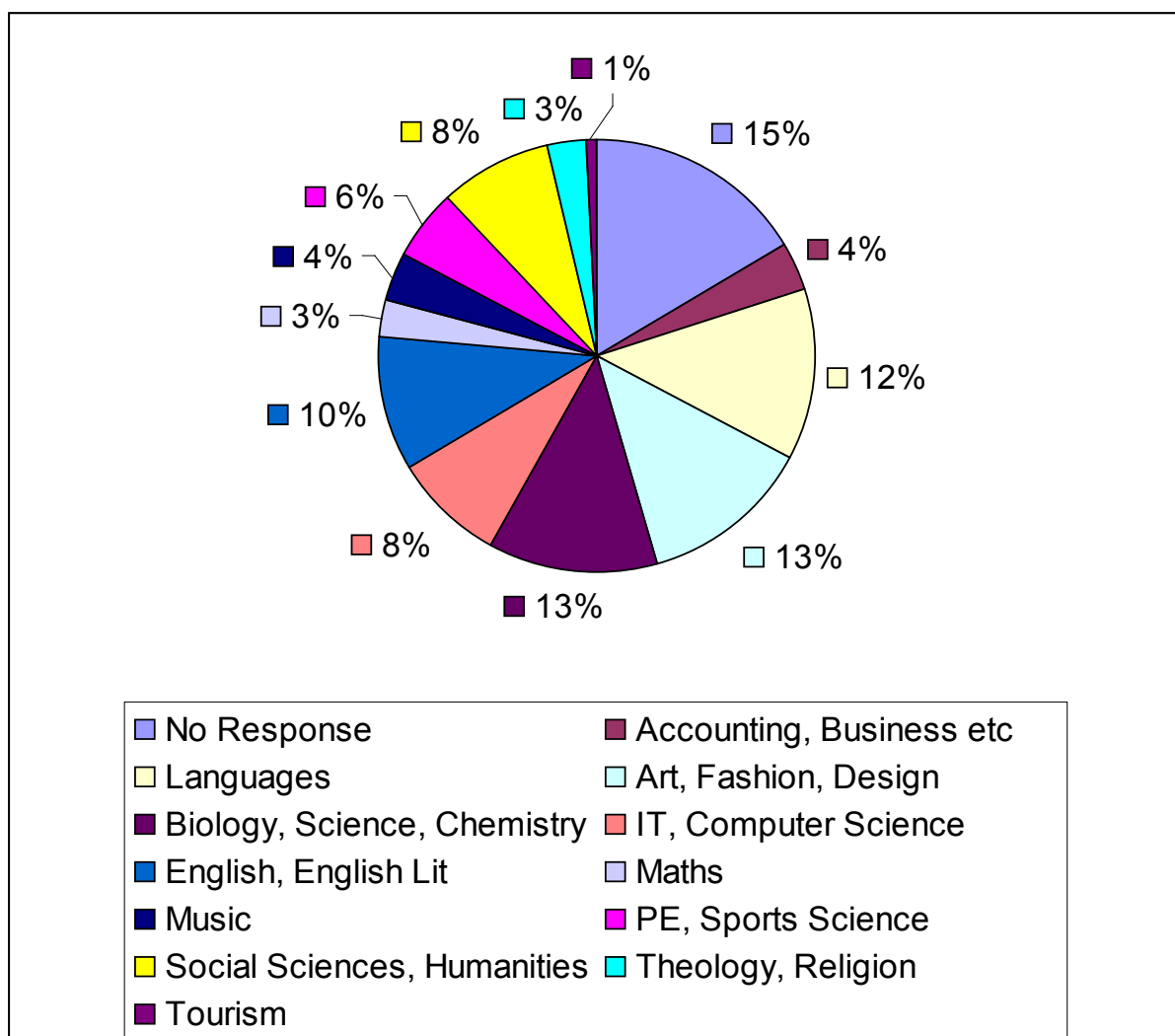The gender split of respondents was mostly female, with 56% females to 30% males.
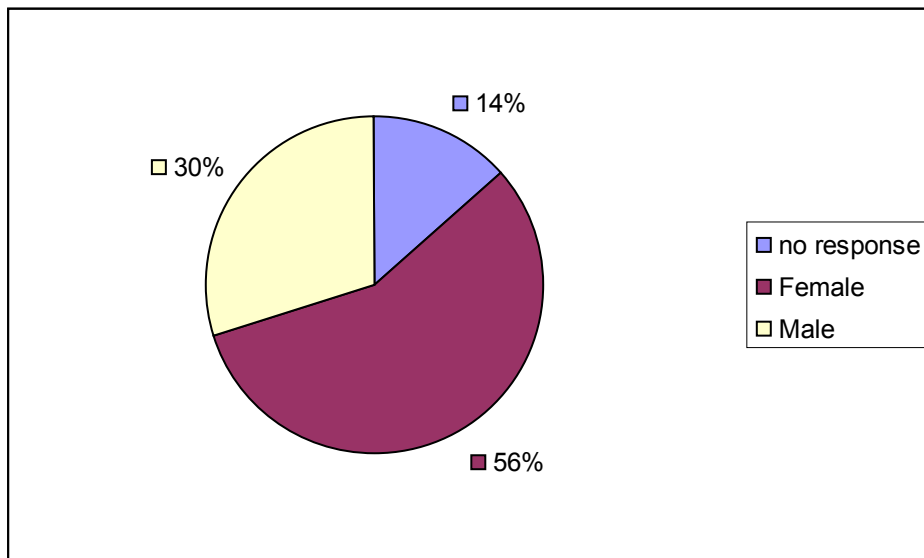
The ethnicity of the respondents was mixed, however the largest minority was white (44% including all white ethnicities), Asian ethnicities combined were 24% and black ethnicities combined were 10%.
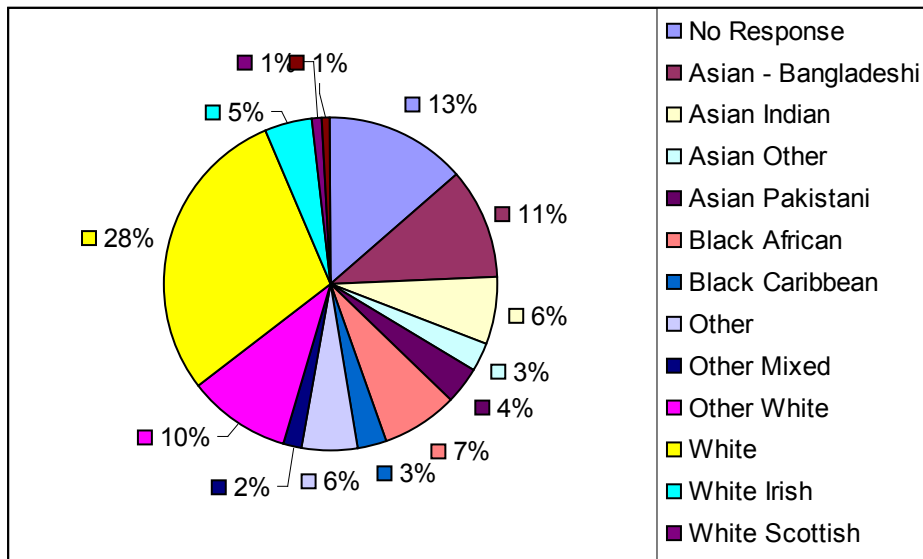
A significant majority (77%) of the respondents were home students (as opposed to EU or overseas).

Respondents came from a wide variety of subject areas from their first degree. These were as follows:

Legend	
No Response	Accounting, Business etc
Languages	Art, Fashion, Design
Biology, Science, Chemistry	IT, Computer Science
English, English Lit	Maths
Music	PE, Sports Science
Social Sciences, Humanities	Theology, Religion
Tourism	

5.6 Any other comments

In this section we wanted to capture any other comments and feedback.

Many participants used the opportunity to provide other comments regarding their experience with the project.

Some of the discussion centred on the timing of the wiki sessions and work, as many felt that it should have been done earlier in the year, before the placements.

The Virtual School was much more applicable and helpful after my first placement, only then I understood the point of it

Engagement might have been higher if the VS had been initiated at the very beginning before we had the opportunity to get too comfortable in our subject groups. The VS experience felt more like an enforced exercise rather than an enjoying + constructive one.

Did feel that the virtual school should just have been done before placements. As there was too much work to be completed once we start teaching. The global citizenship day was a good idea but I have not been able to think about it.

Virtual school is not a very bad idea, but it should only be used prior to our actual school placements. Running it throughout the whole PGCE course is not a good idea as most students have more important things to do in their actual schools. When you get the actual experience by working at a real school, the virtual school does not make much sense. The virtual school is a good idea but only and only for the time before we start our placements.

I feel the VS was difficult to continue with after starting placement + query whether it should be a project from Sept-Dec only.

Some commented that it would have been taken more seriously if assessed, but it must be borne in mind that the majority did not wish this work to be formally assessed.

Although I think VS in theory is a great idea, I would have liked to have known that each piece of work I contributed was going to be marked and counted towards our overall PGCE. I would have been far more dedicated and made more of an effort- I feel that in school you can gain much more of a valuable insight from experienced staff, rather than talking everything through with other students. I think VS should either be <u>scrapped,</u> or it should be <u>formally assessed on an individual basis.</u>

Some pupils did not contribute as much because there were no formal assessment requirements and this put a strain on other members who felt they had to take charge of the group. Overall very good teamwork. I've got to know other pupils from the other groups- cross dimensions and learned from each other.

I think I've said it all. The VS project either needs to be formerly assessed graded + contributes towards passing the PGSE or not at all. The work required is sometimes not straightforward, and turns out to be time consuming - i.e. Citizenship task. Registers are provided for core work, yet not all VS trainees contribute. You need to crack down for this project to work. I can see the relevance but haven't found it all that useful apart from EAL and SEN work. Sorry, I thought you might prefer my honesty.

I would have contributed more to wiki if being assessed but I'm glad it wasn't. There is already so much going on in the PGCE course itself. I really didn't enjoy the group tasks cause it felt like just communicating because we had to.

Some comments re-iterated earlier comments about the inconsistencies in the amount of work that was conducted by individuals.

I think that I have mentioned that I feel unlucky with my VS due to certain members not turning up, and making little or no contribution to the wiki/and or meetings. I don't know if anything could be done in future to make people make more effort, maybe assessment. SORRY FOR BEING NEGATIVE! - IT'S HONEST THOUGH!

The virtual school concept is innovative and has good intentions. However in practise I actually hate everything about it. If you want to teach you must be a peoples person + able to work individually as well as a group. I found that so many people didn't have these qualities + so made it a nightmare to work as a group. The experience in school is completely sufficient and more realistic. Every task was added work and stress + I feel the course is jam-packed enough. Able to mix with members of staff from other subjects - not necessary to be pushed into that situation. The time could have been better used on other things i.e. subject knowledge....

There were some who felt that the VS project was not at all useful for them.

I honestly think the whole thing wastes a lot time and just causes friction between different subjects. Some people work a lot harder than others and this is not noted, therefore crediting people who don't deserve it.

I personally feel that once we are in our placements that the virtual schools wiki is unnecessary.

I don't feel the wiki - virtual schools idea was particularly helpful. However, it may just need to be altered in some way to make it more permanent to teacher training.

The tasks in wiki have taken up time from other fields of work.

More positive comments included:

I think the ideas of using the wiki are is excellent. It's nice to know that we can all help & inspire each other. I want to contribute more but need to know how to use the wiki program and contribute.

The Virtual School Project is great for meeting other trainees, increasing socialisation and enforcing mixing students. The school visit & report was useful and the EAL/SEN task was good, but too much work for this point in time. Personally, during the SE1 placement, my mind was occupied with teaching & planning, and found the VS project unnecessary & time consuming. Especially as my subject (RE) uses the other wiki so often, there was never a need for the VS one.

Good idea but under used. More time to get it running. More guidance at the start + clearer idea of how contributions can/will count to QTS standards etc

At first I did not like the idea of a virtual school - wanted to sit with my friends. After a while I made new friends and was able to gain an understanding of the role of diff subjects in the school. It was a great way of learning about issues such as EAL, SEN that I may not have had time to read about or come across in my school placement.

Although I was initially sceptical about the VS wiki - I did enjoy using it + certainly have gained from other colleague's contributions.

Working in the virtual schools allowed me to meet people from other subjects + cultures. This was useful as there were some aspects of cultures which I may not have considered which I was then aware of in a teaching setting. I did at times find the virtual school frustrating but think that was mainly a personality mix issue within the group. While I found the VS useful I prefer to discuss and work together in person rather than online.

6.0 Conclusions

In terms of the future development of this pilot research project, we are currently analysing the quantitative data in more depth to look at the differentiated patterns of communal and individual learning. We are also looking at the on-line data, using discourse analysis tools, to identify the patterns of student interactions and the types of knowledge and understanding being created. An on-going issue is how we gauge individual and communal professional learning in these kinds of blended / virtual learning contexts.

In terms of the future development of the curriculum initiative, the on-going questions include:

- How do we tackle the very marked differentiations in student engagement?
- How would assessing the on-line activities to ensure that all students participate change the nature of the initiative?
- How will participation and learning change once all the activities take place on the wiki (rather than partly on the wiki and partly on the university's VLE). Will this change in the technology facilitate student engagement in the schools?
- How do we engage partnership schools more centrally in the initiative?
- Use of interview data for pre- course composition of Virtual School groupings
- Involvement of students from different teacher training pathways (employment based trainees on the Graduate Teacher Programme and Returners)
- Host all VS activity on a wiki
- Involvement of partnership schools in project through 'buddying' real and virtual schools
- More timetabled time slots for Virtual School activities
- More self and peer assessment of Virtual School engagement
- Allocation of academic tutor to each Virtual School in role of 'LA adviser'

More generally, none of the tasks set for the Virtual Schools are 'new'. Issues around EAL provision, cross curricular learning and transition between primary and secondary schools have been tackled through traditional problem-based learning and enquiry-based learning by pre-service students in many core professional studies courses over the years. These more traditional learning modes have also no doubt resulted in professional learning for many of the students concerned. For this initiative, we therefore still have to explore fully some of the fundamental questions, including whether the potential of problem-based learning is enhanced in the on-line and collaborative environments of the Virtual Schools, and whether these contexts provide accelerated professional learning and induction. In other words, can the initiative claim to have achieved its aim of providing an e- space in which new forms of learning can be created or is it on the words of Littleton and Bayne, quoted above, 'an (*e-learning*) environment where existing teaching spaces and practices are simply reproduced' (Littleton & Bayne, 2008: 27)? Does this initiative begin to provide a 'third way' for our pre-service students, many of whom are Prensky's (2005) 'digital natives' but others of whom would be better defined as 'digitial immigrants', to generate professional knowledge and understanding? Does it provide these students with high quality and viable models of how ICT can generate enhanced learning opportunities in Higher and school education? But whatever the longer term judgements on this particular initiative may be, we would stress the need for alternative modes of learning in teacher education, drawing on new technologies, to be developed.

7.0   Appendix 1 – Bibliography

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8.0 Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

Cass School of Education

Evaluation Virtual Schools Wiki 2008/9

Name: _____
(Please print)

Virtual School: _____
(Please print)

Section 1 - Using the Virtual Schools Wiki

This section seeks to identify how you engaged with the VS Wiki by asking questions about access and usage as well as exploring issues around contributing to the wiki.

Access & Use

Initially set up as a public wiki, from November 2008 the VS Wiki was changed to a private wiki.

1.1 How easy was it to access the *public* VS Wiki?

❑(1) Difficult   ❑(2) Fairly easy   ❑(3) Easy   ❑(4) Don't know

1.2 How easy is it to access the *private* VS Wiki?

❑(1) Difficult   ❑(2) Fairly easy   ❑(3) Easy   ❑(4) Don't know

1.3 How easy is it to use the VS Wiki?

❑(1) Difficult   ❑(2) Fairly easy   ❑(3) Easy   ❑(4) Don't know

Usage

1.4 Before you went out on your placement, on average, how often did you log onto the VS Wiki?

❑(1) Daily   ❑(2) 3 - 4 times per week   ❑(3) 1 - 2 times per week

❑(4) Less than once a week ❑(5) Never logged on   ❑(6) Don't know

1.5 When you did log onto the VS Wiki, on average, how long was each session?
Please include any time spent composing text offline in a word processing package.

❑(1) More than 60 minutes.   ❑(2) 30 - 60 minutes   ❑(3) Less than 30 minutes.

1.6 Thinking about a typical session on the VS Wiki, on average, how much time did you spend on the following activities?

Activity	More than 60 minutes	30 - 60 minutes	15 - 30 minutes	Less than 15 minutes
Reading content (own VS)	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)
Reading content (other VS)	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)
Posting /composing content	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)
Editing content	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)

1.7 Where do you normally access the VS Wiki from?

❑ (1) University ❑ (2) Home ❑ (3) Work ❑ (4) Other _____
(Please specify)

Section 2 - Activities & Tasks

This section seeks to explore how you approached the collaborative tasks and activities that each Virtual School has been asked to undertake to date.

2.1 Some learners prefer collaborative working whilst others prefer to work alone. For some, the nature of the task or activity may influence their preference. What are your preferences?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a) I mainly prefer to work alone	❑ (1)	❑ (2)	❑ (3)	❑ (4)	❑ (5)	❑ (6)
b) I mainly prefer to work in a group	❑ (1)	❑ (2)	❑ (3)	❑ (4)	❑ (5)	❑ (6)
c) My preference depends on the nature of the task	❑ (1)	❑ (2)	❑ (3)	❑ (4)	❑ (5)	❑ (6)

2.2 How did your Virtual School approach the activities and tasks assigned to date?

For example
How was the work divided amongst the team members?
Were team members assigned roles or responsibilities?
Was assignment on the basis of expertise or willingness to undertake the task?

2.3 How did you and your Virtual School benefit from being able to view other VS Wikis

For example
How often did you look at the other VS Wikis?
How did the content and postings of other VS Wikis impact on your own learning?
Did the design and content of your VS Wiki benefit by being able to view and access the other VS Wikis?

_____

<div style="border:1px solid black; height:80px;"></div>

2.4 How did the composition of the group influence your approach and the contribution made by your group?

For example
What have you gained from working in a cross-curricula group?
What have been the challenges of working with colleagues from different academic disciplines/subjects? If the group experienced conflict, how was this resolved?

2.5 Thinking about the four activities and tasks you have been asked to undertake to date, which activities have you contributed to?
(Please tick all that apply)

❑(1) Transition   ❑(2) SEN   ❑(3) EAL   ❑(4) Anti-bullying

2.6 Thinking about the face-to-face sessions (staff meetings), how would you describe your contribution?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a) I contributed more than other members of the group.	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)	❑(5)	❑(6)
b) I contributed as much as other members of the group.	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)	❑(5)	❑(6)
c) I contributed less than other members of the group.	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)	❑(5)	❑(6)
d) It provided the opportunity to discuss issues with	❑(1)	❑(2)	❑(3)	❑(4)	❑(5)	❑(6)

other members of
the group.

2.7 Thinking about your online activity on the VS Wiki, how would you describe your
participation / contribution?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a) I contributed more than other members of the group.	☐ (1)	☐ (2)	☐ (3)	☐ (4)	☐ (5)	☐ (6)
b) I contributed as much as other members of the group.	☐ (1)	☐ (2)	☐ (3)	☐ (4)	☐ (5)	☐ (6)
c) I contributed less than other members of the group.	☐ (1)	☐ (2)	☐ (3)	☐ (4)	☐ (5)	☐ (6)
d) It provided the opportunity to discuss issues with other members of the group.	☐ (1)	☐ (2)	☐ (3)	☐ (4)	☐ (5)	☐ (6)

2.8 How would you rate feedback from teaching staff posted on the VS Wiki in response to
the activities and tasks undertaken by your Virtual School?

☐ (1) Not at all useful   ☐ (2) Some what useful   ☐ (3) Useful

☐ (4) Very useful   ☐ (5) Don't know

2.9 Did you amend colleagues' contributions?

☐ (1) Yes   ☐ (2) No

2.10 Did colleagues edit your contributions?

☐ (1) Yes   ☐ (2) No

2.11 Tell us some more about contributing and editing

For example
Did you have any concerns when editing other people's work? How did you feel when your
won work was edited? How do you feel about group members who don't contribute to the
wiki?

Section 3 – Developing Virtual Schools and VS Wiki

This section seeks to ascertain your views on how the VS Wiki could be developed for future cohorts.

3.1 Would it be useful / helpful to provide a Virtual Schools' Handbook with guidance and templates?

❑ (1) Yes   ❑ (2) No

3.2 Why do you say that?

> *For example*
> If you think a handbook would be useful, what should it contain?
> Alternatively, are there benefits in not being prescriptive and providing templates as examples?

3.3 Should group work on the VS Wiki be formally assessed?

❑ (1) Yes   ❑ (2) No

3.4 If your work had been assessed, what would you prefer?

❑ (1) Individual assessment   ❑ (2) Group assessment

❑ (3) A combination of individual and group assessment   ❑ (4) Don't know

3.5 Would your contribution to VS Wiki been different had it been formally assessed?

❑ (1) Yes   ❑ (2) No

3.6 Based on the current tasks and activities what do you think about the time allocated to face-to face meetings (staff meetings) for the Virtual Schools?

❑ (1) More time needs to be allocated. How much? *(Please specify)* _____

❑ (2) The time allocated is sufficient   ❑ (3) Less time is needed   ❑ (4) Don't know

3.7 What did you think about the features and functionality of the VS Wiki?

> *For example*
> Which features / functions were easy to use? Which features / functions could be improved?
> Are there features / functions you would like to add?

Section 4 - Professional practice

In this section we want to ascertain how learning from the Virtual School will be taken forward into professional practice.

4.1 Have you used a wiki or any of the ideas generated through collaborative learning in the Virtual School in your school experience/placement?

❑(1) Yes   ❑(2) No

4.2 What is the likelihood that you will use a wiki in your professional practice?

❑(1) Very unlikely   ❑(2) Unlikely   ❑(3) Likely   ❑(4) Very Likely   ❑(5) Don't know

4.3 Did the work in the Virtual Schools help to develop your ideas about teaching?
If so, how?

For example
Please try to be specific and provide examples from your school experience / placement as well as university-based sessions.

Section 5 - About you

In this section we want to explore the relationship between the learner's background and their experience of the VS Wiki. Rather than ask you to complete more questions we would like to link your responses to questions in this questionnaire to data that you have previously provided to UEL.

We should be grateful if you would give your permission for us to link to the following:

5.1   ICT Audit / Questionnaire – data held by the Cass School of Education
       ❑(1) Yes   ❑(2) No

5.2   Student record – demographic data held by Cass School of Education and UEL Student Records.

       ❑(1) Yes   ❑(2) No

Section 6 - Any other comments

In this section we want to capture any other comments and feedback. We should be grateful if you would use the space below to elaborate on your responses to any of the questions above as well as identifying any issues that have not been covered by the questionnaire.

Please use this space to add any other comments.

Section 7 – Further research and evaluation

We propose conducting a limited number of focus group interviews in June 2009. Focus group sessions will be approximately 60 – 90 minutes in duration and will explore in greater depth the data generated by this survey.

If you would be willing to participate in a focus group please insert your contact details below:

Contact e-mail : _____
(Please print)

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.