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TQEF Project

Solent Community of Pedagogic Practice

FINAL REPORT

September 2009
Executive Summary

The Community of Practice/Community of Learning approach facilitates networks of people who have common interests and aims. It is through these communities, both informal and formal, that participants are able to interact, communicate, learn from one another, solve problems and create new knowledge. While the concept is certainly not new, many of the recent developments have seen organisations seeking to harness and develop knowledge that ‘adds value’ through knowledge management, individual and organisational learning.

The central aim of this feasibility study was to identify the main issues that would influence the design and development of a Community of Pedagogic Practice (CoPP) at Southampton Solent University. There were four main parts to the study, starting with a detailed review of the literature relating to Communities of Practice/Learning Networks and Virtual communities of practice. Four leading practice Higher Education Institutions, with recently launched and/or established communities of learning were identified. Interviews with key members of staff from these institutions were used to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences in developing and maintaining communities of learning. Internal stakeholder research at Southampton Solent University was also completed this included one to one interviews with key stakeholders responsible for research and scholarship, staff development, and learning and teaching. An online survey was administered in order to establish current and likely future pedagogic learning preferences of all academic and support staff. Finally, the technological assessment sought to evaluate the potential of the University intranet to provide an online space to support the development of a community of practice.

The study concluded that there is broad support at Southampton Solent University for the establishment of a Community of Learning to support pedagogic research and share effective pedagogic practice. Similar initiatives at other Higher Education Institutions are proving beneficial and attracting considerable interest (for example the Inquiring Pedagogies (iPED) Research Network at Coventry University). Experience shows that the development of a successful Community of Learning will require time and persistence. A number of barriers and areas for particular attention have been identified from the literature and case study institutions. Awareness of these issues by the leaders of the proposed Community of Learning as Southampton Solent University will reduce the time needed for the network to become established and increase the return on investment.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This is a feasibility study that forms phase one of a three-phase project that ultimately aims to introduce a Community of Pedagogic Practice (CoPP) within Southampton Solent University (SSU).

The aim of the Solent CoPP is to share developments in learning, teaching and assessment practice effectively within SSU and its associated partners. The eventual development and introduction of the Solent CoPP will also assist SSU in the achievement of three of its 2004-2008 Strategic Objectives:

(i) To enhance the learning opportunities and achievements of our students

(iii) To increase the quality and quantity of advanced scholarship and professional development

(viii) To use our resources effectively and efficiently in order to enable these objectives to be achieved

1.2 Aim

This first phase feasibility study aims to identify the key issues that will influence the design and construct of a fully costed CoPP model, which will direct the development and introduction of the CoPP within SSU.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this feasibility study are:

1. To research current academic literature with regard to pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice

2. To research current approaches and best practice within the wider academic community and relevant public and private institutions with regard to pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice

3. To evaluate the views of key stakeholders including SBS, FMAS, FTEC and WMA and staff groups including the PgC LTHE Community with regard to a Solent CoPP
4. To examine the full potential of myCourse to provide an online space to support the Solent CoPP.

1.4 Organisation of Report

The material in this report is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 - An overview of the research methodology employed

Chapter 3 - Literature review

Chapter 4 - Key findings from research visits to four case study institutions

Chapter 5 - Results of a survey of staff at Southampton Solent University

Chapter 6 - Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

Additional supporting information is included in the appendices to this report.
2. Methodology

Figure 1 illustrates the work completed by the project team. Essentially there were four main parts to the study, starting with a detailed review of the literature relating to Communities of Practice/Learning Networks and Virtual communities of practice. Four leading practice Higher Education Institutions, with recently launched and/or established communities of learning were identified. Interviews with key members of staff from these institutions were used to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences in developing and maintaining communities of learning. Internal stakeholder research at Southampton Solent University was also completed this included one to one interviews with key stakeholders responsible for research and scholarship, staff development, and learning and teaching. An online survey was administered in order to establish current and likely future pedagogic learning preferences of all academic and support staff. Finally, the technological assessment sought to evaluate the potential of the university intranet to provide online space to support the development of a community of practice.

The work was conducted fully in accordance with the Southampton Solent University Ethics Policy.
Learning Community Model

1. Literature Review
2. Leading Practice Assessment
3. Internal Stakeholder Research
4. Technology Assessment

Learning Community Model

Fig. 1: The research methodology
3. Literature Survey

Author: Lesley Macdonald

This section presents a discussion of the existing body of literature regarding Communities of Practice (CoP) with particular emphasis on virtual CoPs (vCoPs) or virtual learning communities. Within these, it also examines the literature regarding critical success factors, barriers to development as well as providing an overview of best practice examples and case studies found in published literature and on the World Wide Web.

3.1 Background and context

The concept of Communities of Practice is not new. They were common in ancient times, such as the ‘corporations’ of craftsmen in classical Greece and the guilds of artisans during the Middle Ages, all of which had a social and business purpose. Today they are less likely to be composed of people working on their own, and are more commonly found within large organisations (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Lave and Wenger (1991) first coined the term Communities of Practice in their seminal work *Situated Learning*, with Wenger developing the concept further in his work entitled *Communities of Practice, Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Wenger, 1998). Ever since, the term has been ‘used, applied, criticised, adapted and developed’ by researchers in the fields of social, educational and management sciences (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p1).

Lave and Wenger (1991, p98) define a Community of Practice (CoP) as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world; over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice”. The central tenet of CoPs is Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) where newcomers learn from ‘old timers’ by being allowed to participate in certain limited tasks practiced in the community. Likened to apprenticeships, with time, newcomers progress from being peripheral to the community (an apprentice) to full participation (a master). CoPs are an “intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” with learning not simply situated in practice but as an integral part of practice that is “generative social practice in the lived in world” (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Kimber et al, 2000; Swan & Shea, 2005).

Members of a CoP often have a common purpose and language, shared background and experience. It is through the community that they are able to interact, communicate, learn from one another, solve problems and create new knowledge (Hildreth et al., 1998).
Wenger and Snyder (2000, p139) define CoPs in organisations as “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise... some meet regularly... others are connected primarily by email.” Wenger (2008) presents the following elements when combined as being crucial to create a CoP:

- **The domain:** A CoP has an identity defined by a ‘shared domain of interest’. Members have a commitment to the domain and a shared ability that sets them apart. They value their collective abilities and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may value or recognise their expertise.

- **The community:** In following their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, provide help to each other and share information. They develop relationships that allow them to learn from one another.

- **The practice:** CoP members are practitioners. With time and by continually interacting, they develop a shared range of resources including ‘experiences, stories, tools and methods of solving persistent problems’ (Wenger, 2008).

There have been many other, wide ranging and varied definitions in the literature, with different understandings of and emphasis on CoP theory and practice (Hildreth et al., 1998; Kimble et al., 2000; Roberts, 2006; Pemberton et al., 2007). Many of the recent developments in CoPs have been evolutionary and virtual in form, with organisations seeking to harness and develop knowledge that ‘adds value’ through knowledge management, individual and organisational learning, management strategy, adaptive systems and knowledge ecology (Pemberton et al., 2007).

Whatever form developments in CoPs take, interaction, problem solving, the sharing of expertise and the creation of new, often tacit knowledge, through learning in a social context remains a central theme (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hildreth et al., 1998; Pemberton et al., 2007). Tacit knowledge is hard to communicate because it is mostly intuitive and embedded in a specific context, and the CoP's ability to generate and disseminate this is one of its most widely acknowledged benefits (Ardichvilli et al., 2006).

### 3.2 The defining characteristics of CoPs - the need for nurture

“People in communities of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems,” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p140). CoPs can be organic, spontaneous and informal networks that generate knowledge and in doing so renew themselves. Their very characteristics tend to make
them resistant to supervision and interference. As a result, the challenge for managers is to cultivate, nurture and sustain CoPs ‘like a garden’, without destroying them (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Although communities of practice are considered to be fluid in nature, core drivers of the community are located at its centre with other members situated on the periphery (Wenger et al., 2002). Citing the analogy of a spark and a fire, Campbell & Uys (2007) argue that it is the core membership that is critical to the CoP’s survival as it instigates and drives the community and continues the flame to burn, encouraging participation from members and steering them towards achieving their end goals.

An outline of the key features of a CoP as described by Wenger (1998) and cited in Roberts (2006) is attached as Appendix 1.

In addition, Wenger & Snyder (2000) argue that CoPs cannot be made mandatory. Organisations can only bring the right people together, provide an infrastructure that supports their operation and development and use non-traditional measurements to establish their value, such as gathering and publishing anecdotal evidence and stories of their success (Wenger and Snyder, 2000).

However, Hildreth et al., (1998) contend that both formal and informal groups can function as a CoP. In identifying their common characteristics from existing literature (Appendix 2, central features), and other characteristics that appear to be present, they argue that the exclusion of informality does not mean that a formal group is not a CoP. This also applies to the removal of other non-central facets (Appendix 2). Recently, the focus in academic texts has shifted to evaluate formal, managed communities of practice in which facilitators enable virtual learning communities to work towards objectives that meet the aims of an organisation (Allan & Lewis, 2006), rather than less formal entities.

Therefore, a CoP can be seen as an umbrella concept under which different groups, both formal and informal, display different non-central characteristics to a greater or lesser extent. Also, it would appear that CoPs can be as diverse as the ‘situations that give rise to them’ (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p141). They can comprise of tens or hundreds of people, but with a core of participants with a passion for the subject that energises the CoP and gives it intellectual and social leadership. There are, however, subtle yet distinct differences between CoPs and work groups, project teams or informal networks which are commonly found in large organisations (Wenger & Snyder, 2000), as illustrated in Appendix 3.
3.3 Virtual Communities of Practice

Shared knowledge and the development of new knowledge is also the goal of virtual or online communities of practice or virtual learning communities (VLCs). With the advancement of technology and the Internet, and the growth in the use of information communications technologies (ICTs) and computer-mediated communications (CMCs) in public and private organisations, virtual CoPs have grown in number and importance (Hildreth et al, 1998; Rogers, 2000; Stacey et al., 2004). A vCoP is defined as “a network of individuals who share a domain of interest about which they communicate online,” (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007, p1). Participants share resources, experiences, issues and working practices, with communication between participants resulting in the improved knowledge of each individual which contributes to overall knowledge development. Virtual learning communities also aim to increase the knowledge of participants, via formal education or professional development, with informal learning or e-learning generated as a result (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

Kleinman (2003, p. 75-76) cited in Milne and Callaghan (2006) purports the following differences between traditional and online communities:

- Shared interest rather than geographical proximity brings people together
- They are quicker at building communities
- They are more transitory because there is no restriction on membership and individuals can leave or join at any time without any consequences
- People control their online personae and can read messages without posting any (therefore, it is often difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of who is in the community) making it difficult to measure them demographically, and
- They develop without central governance.

VCoPs frequently use a diverse range of traditional media including telephone, teleconferencing, facsimile, etc. as well as technological tools such as email, videoconferencing, newsgroups, databases, web sites and intranet to support communication between members (Dubé et al. 2005; Rice et al., 2005). The challenges that these communication media bring to vCoPs is discussed in more detail later in this document (see page 15).
VCoPs also rely on human interaction and relationships: “(They) require interaction with people as well as technology. Relationships one to another between people and with the learning processes are necessary for the achievement of a redefined self that is the real end product,” (Cockburn et al, 2001, p190).

In addition, VCoPs can face specific challenges that have been explored only to a limited extent in the literature. Their specific structuring characteristics and reach mean that adopting a ‘one size fits all’ approach to creating, launching, developing and managing them may not yield fruitful outcomes (Dubé et al., 2005). In addition, there are also issues over trust, knowledge sharing with a fear of criticism and misleading other community members being voiced as concerns amongst members (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

3.4 Developing a successful vCoP

Pemberton et al (2007) found that the development of a successful vCoP depends on a number of critical success factors:

- The group’s context and focus being relevant to its members needs.

- Its initiators / leadership - key participants or founders should stay as active contributors - those that leave often do so to the detriment of the community and it may disintegrate. In addition, leaders need to strike a balance between guidance and authority to support rather than dominate discussions which can alienate members and stifle the vCoP’s development.

- The technological infrastructure and its ability to support online discussion boards as well as real-time meetings.

- By providing ongoing management and maintenance of the CoP - this is akin to the leadership issues highlighted above, particularly when managing power / conflict issues when members do not feel they have freedom of expression, perhaps through inhibition by the presence of more senior organisational members, leading to them feeling marginalised or ignored; this can lead to the CoP failing and breaking up.

- Transparency and inclusiveness of processes - in particular the setting up and management of the CoP, so as not to alienate other individuals in the organisation who are not part of the community.

- By not imposing conformity to a specific organisational culture or identity, which can stifle innovation and creativity. Members should be allowed to negotiate their own
norms and boundaries to enable positive interaction. This echoes Wenger and Snyder’s (2000) vision of the free-flowing nature of a successful CoP.

Ardichvilli et al. (2003) identify three other key elements required for the successful functioning of an online vCoP:

- Active participation from a substantial number of willing members who share knowledge including engaging in live chats, Q&A sessions, providing asynchronous feedback on previous postings - the ‘supply-side’ element.

- Members using the CoP as a source of knowledge including many members visiting the CoP website, using online search tools or posting questions when searching for advice or information - the ‘demand-side’ element.

- Members being comfortable participating in a ‘computer-mediated’, Internet-based community with limited face-to-face communication, with the appropriate, prerequisite technology skills.

Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) identified the following critical success factors (CSFs) for virtual learning communities:

- Technology provision, its usability and the development of the necessary IT skills amongst members to use the technology effectively

- The Internet and technology’s ability to act as a medium to manage relationships and facilitate interaction and communication between members

- The ability amongst members to identify those with prior knowledge of each other to consolidate membership and develop trust

- Members of the vCoP need to feel a sense of belonging, of being ‘an insider’

- Attention to cross-national and cross-cultural dimensions and developing a shared understanding of these - this is complicated by the lack of physical cues, gestures, nuances, routines etc. in a virtual environment

- A sense of achievable purpose needs to be developed. This can be created by effective leadership, to monitor, regulate, maintain boundaries and respond to change, including the use of netiquette and adherence to good practice
• Using user-friendly, appealing language is important to engage members in online dialogue and encourage their participation

• Generating longevity is needed to create trust, rapport and a ‘true sense’ of community.

These, along with key benefits and barriers to vCoPs, are summarised in Appendix 4.

Further barriers to developing a successful vCoP may be identified by examining parallel studies of students’ learning via asynchronous learning networks, where it has been established that some students ‘lurk’ on the periphery of forums rather than contribute fully to discussions. The main concern raised by students was a reluctance to place their ideas on a public forum that could result in those ideas being stolen by others (Goldman & Hiltz, 2005).

### 3.5 The influence of power, trust and predispositions

It is essential to appreciate the role of power within a vCoP to develop a complete understanding of how knowledge is created and disseminated. “Power is the ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control”, (Roberts, 2006, p626). Power affects social interaction and individuals’ perceptions of how it is being used will influence the levels of trust of those taking part in the transfer of that knowledge. Roberts (2006) established that CoPs often contain members from various demographic backgrounds and professional standing, and in the context of Lave & Wenger’s (1991) analysis of situated learning, those members in full participation are likely to have a greater role in the CoP and therefore will be the dominant source of power and influence over those on the periphery. This may make it more difficult for periphery members to contribute to the community as their will and ability may be stifled and inhibited (Roberts, 2006). In addition, the organisation’s structure may dictate its power relations within a CoP, as, in highly centralised structures, power and negotiation is centred on its key authorities and other members voices may become ‘muted’ (Roberts, 2006, p628).

Many writers have commented on the importance of establishing an atmosphere of trust within a vCoP (Kimble et al, 2000; Ardichvilli et al., 2003; Roberts, 2006; Jameson et al., 2006; Campbell & Uys, 2007; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007; Pemberton et al, 2007). Some acknowledge that defining trust can be difficult and problematic, but three conditions are common to its definition: it is identified by belief rather than by actions; it relates to the beliefs about the likely behaviour of another (or others) which matter for the trustor’s decision-making; and it relates to situations where the relationship is
complex and “precludes having recourse to complete contingent contracts with third party enforcement,” (Roberts, 2006, p628).

Only when trust is established, can the vCoP facilitate greater openness and enable tacit knowledge to be shared and learning to take place (Roberts, 2006), as well as allowing assessments to be made by community members as to the potential value of the vCoP and their involvement in it (Kimble et al, 2000; Ardichvilli et al., 2003; Jameson et al., 2006; Pemberton et al, 2007; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

The development of trust has also been identified as a key enabler of interaction between people and vital to the success of virtual organisations and learning communities (Kimble et al, 2000; Campbell & Uys, 2007; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha 2007). Kimble et al (2000, p5) argue that without trust managing a virtual organisation or vCoP successfully is impossible, citing Handy (1995): “Virtuality requires trust to make it work: Technology on its own is not enough.” Moreover, when building successful vCoPs, participants should hold significant levels of trust in members’ competence and integrity, particularly its managers and experts (Ardichvilli et al., 2003). Campbell & Uys (2007) in their study of an academic learning community in Australia established that building trust among its members was the most critical factor in its success.

Therefore, to remove barriers to vCoPs developing it is essential that various types of trust are sustained. In a study of vCoPs used for knowledge management in organisations, Ardichvilli et al. (2003) identified the establishment of the following trust-related elements:

- To promote institution-based trust: by establishing and clearly communicating institutional norms stating that knowledge sharing is an organisational norm, that the organisation trusts its employees, and that sharing is a moral obligation for all

- To reduce anxiety and uncertainty about what constitutes acceptable postings, breaches of security rules, etc: by establishing and clearly communicating norms and standards for sharing knowledge

- To promote knowledge-based trust: by establishing multiple face-to-face communities of practice e.g. study and discussion groups, informal task forces

In line with Ardichvilli et al.(2003)’s findings, other authors concur that to enable trust and identity to be established regular face-to-face meetings between vCoP members should be held, with participants encouraged to be involved in shared activities such as
meetings and events. Face-to-face contact can also improve communication, lessen cultural differences and can help to overcome barriers of physical distance, allowing relationships to develop quickly, to strengthen and deepen (Kimble et al., 2000; Dubé et al., 2005; Campbell & Uys, 2007).

Aligned with trust and power issues that can limit the creation of new knowledge in a vCoP, it has been argued that members are likely to have preferences and predispositions that may exert influence which, although they may be moderated, tend not to disappear (Roberts, 2006). As a result, these preferences and predispositions can influence the CoP’s ability to develop and absorb new knowledge. This in turn affects its ability to innovate. Whilst incremental knowledge developments may still be achieved, individuals and the CoP tend to be ‘path dependent’ with any new knowledge that is created only reinforcing existing preferences or dispositions. To achieve radical innovation, old communities may have to be disbanded and new ones created (Roberts, 2006). In relation to academia this may be an important consideration in developing a vCoP as academia is a profession that relies on creativity, with academics being given the ability and freedom to innovate and adapt their research and teaching methods (University of Cambridge, 2007).

3.6 Motivation, management and supportive environments

In addition, it has been ascertained that motivation amongst members can wane and the vCoP can disintegrate over time depending on whether member participation is voluntary or compulsory (such as attached to job progression or enhancement) and how effectively the vCoP is managed (Pemberton et al., 2007). The need for management is also highlighted by Dubé et al. (2005) who argue that whilst spontaneity, informality and lack of regulation were initially considered a CoP’s defining features (Wenger & Snyder, 2000), vCoPs now need to be managed and should form part of a planned strategy supporting the management and development of intellectual capital.

Furthermore, immediacy is considered as being critical to the success of online communication in a vCoP, as posting written questions and responses can take longer than verbal communication. Also, vCoPs that also have a face-to-face element, such as meetings or events to bridge the virtual-physical divide may have advantages over those that use only discussion or bulletin-boards (Pemberton et al., 2007).

Examining the differences between vCoPs that failed and those succeeded, Dubé et al., (2005) concluded that those that succeeded were less likely to have been operating in an obstructive environment, the topic discussed was likely to be directly relevant to the daily
concerns of the members or it could be ‘sold’ as such by its leaders to its members, and
the successful vCoPs had direct support from their organisations.

3.7 Barriers to developing a successful vCoP

In addition to the critical success factors outlined above, a number of potential barriers to
successfully developing and growing a vCoP have been identified. These are summarised as
follows:

• Specialist disciplines - knowledge that requires specialist expertise (e.g. the sciences)
may be difficult to disseminate, aggregate or represent through a vCoP (Gannon-Leary
& Fontainha, 2007). In addition, in studies of asynchronous learning networks, students
in technical and science disciplines who are by nature task-oriented, found online
discussion boards ‘too slow and too chatty’ (Goldman & Hiltz, 2005).

• Cultural differences between team members can cause communication difficulties
(Kimble et al, 2000). These can arise amongst those unfamiliar with or lacking in tacit
knowledge about the vCoP’s internal culture and language (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha,
2007).

• Remoteness - the lack of physical, face-to-face contact can be a barrier, particularly
to new joiners who may feel intimidated.

• The lack of non-verbal cues - because technology is being used to bridge the physical
space between members, the lack of non-verbal cues can also lead to messages being
misinterpreted (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). This can also challenge trust
formation due to a lack of informal interaction and observation of other members’
contributions and efforts to the community (Campbell & Uys, 2007). In addition, the
absence of basic cues about personality and social roles that create self and identity
can be a barrier to effective communication in a virtual environment (Kimble et al,
2000).

• Fluid nature / shifting membership - this requires management and leadership (e.g.
from a moderator) to inject drive and energy to develop and grow the vCoP; this has
echoes of Pemberton et al’s (2007) findings.

• Lack of institutional trust - legal issues, data protection and intellectual property
difficulties between higher education establishments can arise when crossing virtual
boundaries. This echoes students’ concerns about the possibility of intellectual
• Task or practice-based nature of the vCoP - short life task based CoPs tend to be less successful than practice-based CoPs that may have a longer life (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007).

In addition, vCoPs relying on media to support human interaction may find that the characteristics of the media itself may impose constraints on the effectiveness of that communication and could be a barrier to the fruitful development of the vCoP. Email and telephone may solve some communication problems created by temporal and physical distance and enable sharing of quick and easy messages and anecdotes, but in more formal situations face-to-face meetings might be required. Where group members are in different physical locations, perhaps in different regions or countries, video conferencing may be beneficial to include these remotely located members (Hildreth et al. 1998).

3.8 National cultural factors affecting Virtual CoPs

When exploring the cultural factors that influence knowledge sharing in vCoPs, Ardichvili et al. (2006) found that additional challenges were created that need to be addressed at the vCoP’s development stage. They cite Wenger et al. (2002, p118) who acknowledged these difficulties: “People’s willingness to ask questions that reveal their “ignorance”, disagree with others in public, contradict known experts, discuss their problems, follow others in the thread of conversation - all these behaviours vary greatly across cultures”.

To accommodate these nuances, the introduction of country-specific online community web pages should be based on a cultural needs assessment and an identification of culture-specific barriers to knowledge exchange, empirical assessments of which appear lacking in the literature (Ardichvili et al., 2006).

Further, although bringing together highly diversified cultures within a vCoP could be highly enriching, it may also require significant effort to integrate members with different perceptions, systems of meaning, values and beliefs. A wide range of national cultures in a vCoP is often accompanied by a wide range of languages, thus intensifying the communication and collaboration challenges (Dubé et al., 2005).

Also, if it is the intention to create a vCoP that stretches national cultural boundaries, simply translating training materials into various languages may not be sufficient to accommodate cultural nuances. Ardichvili et al., 2006 argue that online behaviour rules
could vary greatly between counties, and procedures including those that appear self-evident may need to be carefully explained, or adjusted to local preferences. This could include community usage guidelines, manuals, netiquette and training materials as well as the procedures for developing, posting, updating, and editing questions and knowledge entries, and those rules for responding to inquiries.

In respect of variances of disciplinary cultures within higher education, it has been found that when multidisciplinary professionals became members of the same learning community these speciality differences were only an issue with members at the vCoP’s outset. With time, it was found that member collaboration and support increased to overcome any perceived disciplinary divides (Allan & Lewis, 2006).

**3.9 From Pedagogy to Heutagogy – A Paradigm Shift**

Some authors have argued that the concept of heutagogy (self-determined knowledge sharing of content and resources; creating new knowledge from existing experience; ‘all round’ capability and empowerment) rather than pedagogy (the art or profession of teaching or preparatory training and instruction, with the teacher assuming what and when it will be learned) is required, centred around knowledge sharing instead of knowledge knowing (Ashton & Newman, 2006).

The concept of heutagogy reflects the changes brought about by Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) and the vast amount of information these technologies can deliver. It acknowledges the diversity of skills needed by the 21st Century academic and underlines the requirement for lifelong learning. Heutagogy is more likely to enable the skills needed for academics to ‘develop confidence in their perceptions and learn to question interpretations of reality from their positions of competence’ (Ashton & Newman, 2006, p829). It depicts a future when knowing how to learn will be a key academic skill. It has been found that a heutagogical approach can move academics from being knowledge transmitters to knowledge brokers, with knowledge linked, shared and enabled by utilising networks in a community of practice (Ashton & Newman, 2006).

**3.10 Lifelong Learning and Virtual Learning Communities**

“Learning together online is most rewarding, ethical, and effective when communication between learners and teachers is rooted in the values of intellectual freedom, open access, respect for privacy and intellectual property, and the construction of new knowledge”, (Goldman & Hiltz, 2005, p 278).
The emergence of and growth in the importance and contribution of communities of practice utilising ICT in academia has been noted by many authors, in terms of its ability to effect blended, collaborative and lifelong learning in a social context to the benefit of student groups and academic professionals alike (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004; Ashton & Newman, 2006; Hartnell-Young et al., 2006; Campbell & Uys, 2007). Several studies have demonstrated the positive motivational learning outcomes of such collaborative approaches using ICTs, the Internet and World Wide Web platforms in higher education that span time, geographic distances and cultures. Yet, despite the interest and research undertaken in this area over the last ten years, it is evolving and much still remains to be learned and understood (Alavi & Dufner, 2005).

Many studies have shown that the impact of learning networks have been significant effecting stronger relationships and bonds between individuals and groups, and enabling partnerships within and between institutions to develop and strengthen (Hartnell-Young et al., 2006). As such, communities of practice can be created to support and underpin the extended breadth and reach of higher educational establishments today: “… the university is no longer the traditional bastion of knowledge, defined either by its disciplinary boundaries or its physical campus, colleges and buildings,” Lea (2005, p180). Virtual learning communities can help to bridge these boundaries.

Lifelong learning has become an increasing priority in political, educational and academic circles, more notably with growing global competition, advances in ICT and the need to redress socio-economic disadvantages (Allan & Lewis, 2006). Changing economic, social and cultural trends have created ‘a remarkably complex and fast moving learning landscape’ (Field, 2006, p17). Harnessing the opportunities that e-learning provides in higher education, virtual learning communities (or vCoPs) can provide a secure and supportive environment or ‘comfort zone’ that underpins academic career progression through the development of increased academic knowledge, professional strength and expertise (Allan & Lewis, 2006).

The trust and support offered by these virtual communities can create ‘transformational power’ that ultimately can provide academic members with the impetus and confidence to embrace increased innovation and professional expertise in the development of their learning careers and even pursue avenues in their academic career paths that otherwise might not have been taken (Allan & Lewis, 2006; de Freitas & Jameson, 2006).
3.11 Designing Effective Learning Networks – Key Issues

In social theories of learning, cognition and learning are viewed as being situated in activities, interactions, practice and knowledge construction. Such theories see these as social undertakings that are prerequisites for learning to take place. Studies have found that learning, both cognitive and affective, is dependant on the tutor’s immediacy behaviours (verbal cues i.e. giving praise, soliciting viewpoints and non-verbal cues i.e. eye contact and gestures, which can reduce the psychological distance between communicators). In turn, these behaviours can positively influence an individual’s motivation to learn. However, the capacity of online environments to fully support such social activities, interactions and the development of learning communities has been viewed as ‘particularly troubling’ for online educators and has given rise to much debate, given that different media have different capabilities to transmit non-verbal and vocal cues and, therefore, the capacity of some media to support learning has been questioned (Swan & Shea, 2005, p242).

Therefore, in respect of communication media’s effectiveness, certain media may be more suited to supporting specific types of content and/or specific pedagogies in academia than others. This is an important consideration given the vast array of media now being used to support asynchronous learning networks, which often combine face-to-face and traditional media with text-based media and audiovisual media. In studies of the effects of media-mixes on online classrooms, Rice et al., (2005) cite Kim et al., (2003) who established that consideration should be given to the various learning styles and preferences of type of medium or information from the individual learner’s perspective. For example, non verbal learners may prefer non verbal materials such as images. Random learners may not learn adequately if text-only communication is used where information is presented sequentially and combining this with other media such as pictures, graphics, video and audio may be important to improve learning outcomes. As such, the “use of synchronous chat, a picture gallery of class members, or asynchronous audio or video clips may increase the sense of social presence and help a class to form a virtual learning community more quickly”, (Rice et al., 2005, p231).

Moreover, the importance of face-to-face contact should not be underestimated as computer-mediated communications (CMCs) technologies have been found to lack the ‘richness’ of face-to-face interactions, whether through formal interactions, casual conversations or informal discussions. In this way trust, common values and a shared understanding can truly be developed between members to support the evolution of the community (Campbell & Uys, 2007).
In addition to media choice, three other key factors have been found to contribute to the successful implementation and use of ICT to enhance learning and construct a sense of community in an academic environment: communication, culture and purpose (Campbell & Uys, 2007).

In a case study of Charles Sturt University, Australia, Campbell and Uys (2007) identified that:

- In terms of communication, technology is only effective in enabling communication when it is has bedded-in, is accepted by users, is transparent and there is a high level of personal interaction. Furthermore, effective communication is essential to develop trust within the community.

- The influence of culture needs to be understood. Co-located members who share experiences and environments are more able to develop a shared understanding and culture of the community than those in isolated locations who tend only to share the culture of their location.

- The community must have a clear, communicated and understood sense of purpose.

Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) argue that understanding and responding to the design challenges that online CoPs provide in an educational environment is critical to their success. They studied two professional academic development projects: a virtual learning and teaching community (VTEC) STAR-online (www.star-online.org) and an academic e-learning project entitled Teaching and Learning Online (TLO). Their aim was to identify the characteristics that created a “self-sustaining online community of professionals that supports and enhances the professional growth of its members,” (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004, p330). Their findings highlight the following elements as important in the design of an effective vCoP for academics:

- Participants having a common sense of responsibility for the activities they engage in
- ICT providing a supportive ‘platform’ for the community
- Creating clearly defined, co-ordinated and evaluated activities with discussion tools that enable dialogue, negotiation and collaborative problem solving
- Having online moderators that provide facilitation, assistance and guidance
- Creating clear rules that govern participation
• Having a common vision within the community regarding its control and ownership, and its goals and artefacts (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004).

In addition, Vrasidas & Zembylas (2004) underline the importance of commitment, innovation, assessment, evaluation, communication and interaction within an online community, using technology in ways that are consistent with constructivist learning. A fuller outline of their findings is presented at Appendix 5.
HE Learning and Teaching Centres/Networks

Summary overviews of content/features to be added to each of the following:

Coventry University iPED

The Inquiring Pedagogies Research Network, Coventry University's Centre for the Study of Higher Education Development:

http://www.coventry.ac.uk/cu/d/1101

University of Salford

Learning and Teaching Research Network:

http://www.edu.salford.ac.uk/her/ltm/

University of Wolverhampton (ref Whitsead, 2004)

Learning and Teaching Research Networks:

http://www.wlv.ac.uk/default.aspx?page=17008

Learning Technology and Pedagogic Research (LTPR):

http://www.wlv.ac.uk/default.aspx?page=17010

University of Plymouth e-Learning Research Network

http://sketchpad.wikispaces.com/

University of Cambridge

Learning and Teaching Support - in development

http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/lts/index.shtml

https://camtools.caret.cam.ac.uk/portal/site!/gateway/page!/gateway-100

University of Oxford

Learning and Teaching Institute

http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk
Imperial College
Centre for Educational Development
http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/edudev/

Cornell
Facility Innovations In Teaching Program
http://www.innovation.cornell.edu

University of Nottingham
Centre for Integrative Learning
http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/integrativelearning/

University of the Arts London
Centre for Learning & Teaching in Art & Design
http://www.arts.ac.uk/cltad/cltad-home.htm
Appendices

Appendix 1 - The Key Characteristics of Communities of Practice

- Sustained mutual relationships - harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick set up of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- The ability to access the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations and other artefacts
- Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

Appendix 2 - Central and Peripheral Features of a Community of Practice

Source: Hildreth et al, 1998
## Appendix 3 - A Comparison of Common Characteristics - The CoP, Formal Work Group, Project Team and Informal Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What’s its purpose?</th>
<th>Who belongs?</th>
<th>What holds it together?</th>
<th>How long does it last?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community of Practice</strong></td>
<td>To develop member’s capabilities; to build and exchange explicit (?) knowledge</td>
<td>Members elect themselves, set their own agendas and establish their own leadership</td>
<td>Passion, commitment, and identification with the group’s expertise</td>
<td>As long as there is interest in maintaining the group; they develop, evolve and disperse, according to the timing, logic, rhythms and social energy of their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal work group</strong></td>
<td>To deliver a product or service</td>
<td>Everyone who reports to the group’s manager</td>
<td>Job requirements and common goals</td>
<td>Until the next reorganisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project team</strong></td>
<td>To accomplish a specified task</td>
<td>Employees assigned by senior management</td>
<td>The project’s milestones and goals</td>
<td>Until the project has been completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal network</strong></td>
<td>To collect and pass on business information</td>
<td>Friends and business acquaintances</td>
<td>Mutual needs</td>
<td>As long as people have a reason to connect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Wenger & Snyder, 2000*
## Appendix 4 - Benefits, Barriers and CFSs of Online CoPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>CSFs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Enhanced learning environment</td>
<td>- Perpetuation vs. change and diversity</td>
<td>- Good use of Internet standard technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Synergies created</td>
<td>- Disciplinary differences</td>
<td>- Technological provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Capabilities extended to higher level</td>
<td>- Culture of independence</td>
<td>- ICT skill competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowledge sharing and learning</td>
<td>- Tacit knowledge</td>
<td>- Institutional acceptance of ICTs as a communication media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gaining insights from each other</td>
<td>- Transactive knowledge</td>
<td>- Good communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Deepening of knowledge, innovation and expertise</td>
<td>- Specialist language</td>
<td>- Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cyclical, fluid knowledge development</td>
<td>- Collegiality, strong physical community</td>
<td>- Common values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling of connection</td>
<td>- Shifting membership</td>
<td>- Shared understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ongoing interactions</td>
<td>- Creating and maintaining information flow</td>
<td>- Prior knowledge of membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assimilation into sociocultural practices</td>
<td>- No face-to-face to break the ice</td>
<td>- Sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neo-apprenticeship style of learning</td>
<td>- Read-only participants (formerly lurkers)</td>
<td>- Cultural awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identity development and formation</td>
<td>- Hidden identities, adopted personas</td>
<td>- Sense of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Practice-based usage</td>
<td>- Lack of trust - personal and institutional</td>
<td>- Sensitivity in regulating, monitoring, facilitating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Selectivity in ICT use</td>
<td>- Netiquette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No body language, misinterpretations</td>
<td>- User-friendly language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Task-based usage</td>
<td>- Time to build up the CoP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gannon-Leary & Fontainha (2007)
## Appendix 5 - Lessons Learned from Online Professional Development and Practical Examples Illustrating the Main Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
<th>Practical Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote ownership, commitment and a shared vision among participants</td>
<td>Provide opportunities to participants to shape the structure, goals and assessment components of the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote interaction by structuring collaboration</td>
<td>Require participants to work in groups to prepare projects or moderate online discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose the right technology tools</td>
<td>Make sure that the online communication tools you use are usable, reliable and appropriate for your target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design for cognitive apprenticeship</td>
<td>Pair expert learners with less experienced learners to work on collaborative projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose authentic tasks and activities</td>
<td>Use real world authentic tasks and activities which will help participants make the direct connection to their professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide regular feedback to participants work</td>
<td>Provide regular feedback to participants work via a variety of mechanisms such as teacher feedback, automatic grading procedures and peer reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote self-reflection</td>
<td>Design activities that encourage participants to act as reflective practitioners and establish connections between the content of their studies and their professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly evaluate and revise</td>
<td>In addition to the yearly project evaluations, use questionnaires to collect evaluation data from learners and moderators at the end of each course/module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a variety of assessment methods</td>
<td>Various methods can be used such as the collection of information gathered from participants’ work, moderations of online discussions, postings in online conferences, and other artefacts developed and shared within the online community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Stacey, E., Smith, P.J., & Barty, K., (2004). Adult Learners in the Workplace: Online learning and Communities of Practice. Distance Education. 25 (1), 107-124


4. Case Study Institutions

Author: Anne Hill

4.1 Introduction

As part of the research project, visits were undertaken to four universities each of which had developed an institutional strategy to encourage staff to share and develop pedagogic practice. These universities were Oxford Brookes, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Glasgow Caledonian. Interviews were conducted with several of the key members of staff involved in these developments in order to gain advice with regard to the development of a community of pedagogic practice at Southampton Solent University. Three main benefits that such a community can bring to a university were identified:

1. Its activities can enhance teaching, learning and the student experience
2. It can foster the development of generic research skills among staff
3. It can provide outlets for pedagogic research within a subject field

4.2 Strategy

Four key requirements of a successful strategy can be identified from the data collected: it should carefully envision the process of implementation, it should embed activities within other institutional practices, it should engage with the academic community and lastly it should include robust mechanisms by which to evaluate its success.

(a) Envision the process of implementation

A number of factors need to be considered at the outset. It was argued that whilst many of these may seem obvious they could also easily be overlooked. The team charged with introducing a community of pedagogic practice must develop a convincing rationale for devoting resources to the further development of pedagogic practice. As one respondent cautioned, ‘Pedagogy has to fight for its place and funding’. The benefits to the institution must be clearly articulated so that they can be widely understood. Such benefits may include its potential ability to help the university tackle perceived ‘common enemies’ - poor ratings on areas of the NSS being given as an example. One respondent advised:

‘Deal with what staff see as key issues … research actual problems, issues and priorities. You need to find a hook that will reel staff in.’
Embedding the network’s activities within wider institutional practices and concerns is seen as a successful strategy but it is clearly one that necessitates, at the outset, an audit of potential points of contact, along with a rating of their relative importance.

All respondents stressed the importance of giving consideration to mechanisms of evaluation so that it would be possible to clearly demonstrate and justify the value that a community of pedagogic practice can bring to members of the university community. Some respondents warned that an evaluation strategy that appeared hurried or a ‘bolt-on’ clearly has the potential to damage credibility.

Several respondents highlighted the need to establish a strong identity for the community of pedagogic practice - one that should clearly contribute to the wider academic identity of the university. Examples here include The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development and The Caledonian Academy. The team charged with establishing a CoPP needs to plan how this might be achieved. In all the universities visited, resources had been allocated to establish a physical centre from which the CoPP is co-ordinated and this centre was viewed as core to its sense of identity within the institution. Thus, thought needs to be given at the outset to the best design for the network - that is, to the most advantageous location for central resources and the relationship between this centre and other hubs of activity within the network. All the universities visited had a core team to drive and co-ordinate the network of activities. As one respondent argued, ‘It is crucial to have a structural commitment to developing networks of teaching and learning’. Also of crucial importance is the presence of a key driver of these activities within each school. Most respondents recommended a ‘Distributive Leadership’ model to encourage a sense of ownership in the schools.

It is evident from the data that a planned allocation of resources is required not just to ‘pump prime’ activities but also to underpin their future development, if such a network is to have the best chance of making an impact within a university. Thus, unsurprisingly, implementation plans must include an audit of potential sources of initial and, perhaps more importantly, ongoing funding for activities. A number of respondents pointed out that the need to secure a ‘structural commitment’ and financial resources necessitated the political acumen to secure backing from ‘friends in high places’ within the schools, committees and top management of the university.

The development of Virtual Learning Environments is a key innovation seen by all respondents to offer opportunities for engaging staff in a community of pedagogic practice. The challenge here is to align interests, resources and activities. One of the
projects of the Caledonian Academy, for example, is the Emerging Technologies for Learning project that is developing learning approaches that can be supported through Web2.0 technologies. It is hope that these strategies will provide the flexibility in delivery that a significant number of students need because they have to combine study with work. One issue to arise from all the interviews was that, with regard to teaching and learning networks, staff prefer face-to-face interaction rather than on-line communication. In most cases the role of on-line provision is seen as a supplementary support rather as the main vehicle for staff engagement in the network. This suggests that the strategic relationship between direct and on-line provision needs to be addressed in the initial design of the network.

Thought needs to be given to the design of a coherent communication strategy to support each stage of the implementation strategy. The launch needs to attract attention and convey a strong identity and rationale for the network. The strategy will need to identify key messages, audiences, communication tools and a timeline for delivery. Establishing a positive reputation for the network necessitates not just good performance but effective communication of its successes.

(b) Embed activities within wider institutional practices

The teams deployed a range of tactics here. Offering support to staff in dealing with curriculum issues is a widely used tactic by all the teams visited. If employed judiciously it can be very effective in gaining acceptance of the networks and ensuring their success. Examples of current curriculum issues being targeted include the following: the use of formative assessment to drive learning, improving retention and progression rates, improving the design of assessment criteria, devising course evaluation mechanisms, improving student feedback practices, adapting to the increased internationalization of both the curriculum and the student body, enhancing employability, coping with increased diversity within the student body, and ensuring robust standards of assessment. It was seen that tackling such issues should enhance scores on NSS and if this could be achieved then the value of the network could be shown. As one respondent put it;

‘Be useful. Deal with key issues from the staff’s perspective. Address their pain’.

Many of these issues linked into the Quality agenda of universities and aligning the activities of the network to this agenda was viewed as a potentially fruitful tactic. It is
also seen as crucially important to align activities to the annual agendas of the schools and faculties within a university:

‘If the Teaching and Learning Network’s activities are not aligned to the priorities of a school’s agenda they are likely to be ignored.’

The Transformation agenda also offers many opportunities to link in with current staff concerns and activities. In all the universities visited considerable emphasis has been placed on using the teaching and learning network to enable staff to develop Blended Learning Activities with the longer term aim of building a comprehensive virtual learning environment. Interestingly, respondents found that experience to date suggests that mature students welcome the flexibility of on-line learning opportunities but younger students tend to value such activities as an enhancement of rather than a replacement for traditional learning activities. Consequently the focus of support has tended towards developing the blend of learning activities provided. It is also evident from some of the examples discussed that converting learning activities to an on-line format is very time and resource intensive. For example, one team had found that it took a three-day workshop involving an academic, e-person and technologist to develop a modest blended learning activity. Nevertheless several universities remain strongly committed to the goal of making e-learning mainstream. An interviewee at Coventry university stressed: ‘E-learning still underpins all our work - it is our USP’.

Another tactic widely employed was to provide activities that supported staff in their involvement with institutional processes such as Periodic Academic Reviews, course development and course Validation & Re-validation events - all of which require staff to actively address pedagogic issues.

A teaching and learning network can also tap into existing staff development activities and the annual appraisal process clearly has the potential to be a driver of involvement in a community of pedagogic practice. In all the universities visited the networks embraced links to PGCTLHE provision and further CPD activities. Also staff holding Teaching and Learning Fellowships could be effective drivers of the network within schools. However all respondents mentioned that a key barrier to sustained staff involvement in the activities of a teaching and learning network is that such activities are often not seen as contributing to the kind of research profile that would gain wider recognition and career advancement.
Most respondents argued that many staff identified strongly with a subject area and viewed subject-based research as of more value than pedagogic research.

The irony here, it was argued, is that in many new universities involvement in pedagogic research is a more accessible route to a research profile. All the teams visited did, therefore, provide and promote the opportunity for staff to get involved in small-scale research projects that could be published; some of these also involved students. Encouraging such research clusters within schools can be an effective means of developing and embedding the network, provided that there are also opportunities to shared practice and findings across the university.

The Caledonian Academy, for example, run a Caledonian Scholars and Associates scheme to drive small-scale research.

All the respondents argued the importance of clear promotion routes for those who decide to become involved in research activities within the field of pedagogic practice. For example, some of the universities visited have Principal Lecturer posts and Professorships specifically for Teaching and Learning. Aligned to this consideration is the view expressed by all respondents that responsibility for the development of pedagogic practice needs to be embedded within the power structure of universities - both at the centre and in faculties - if they are to achieve their potential. Communities of pedagogic practice it seems require powerful backers.

It was also pointed out that the strategy of embedding support obviously needs to be ongoing and thus time should be allocated to ‘horizon scanning’ - to the identification of future opportunities.

(c) Engage with the academic community

Engaging with the academic community is viewed as something of a challenge and one that requires careful attention to both the tactics of engagement and to the communication strategy. It is seen as crucial to provide a clear narrative for staff as regards the rationale, role and direction of the teaching and learning network. That narrative should support the development of a strong identity - some networks have a logo to help accomplish this. Early adapters, Cheerleaders and Champions need to be cultivated across the university. Success and rewards need to be widely celebrated. One tactic suggested is to ensure that there are some ‘quick wins’ to celebrate early on - hints and tips for improving assessment strategies, for example. Whilst the tools of communication varied most networks had a newsletter, e-journal, and website.
Wolverhampton University, for example, runs a Rewarding Excellence event - a day on which awards are given for excellent practice in teaching and learning activities. Building dynamic teams, hubs and a lively community are seen as the best way of generating ongoing interest in the network and drawing new staff into it. The goal clearly is to build a sense of common ownership.

The ultimate goal of a network is of course to enhance students’ engagement with learning and several respondents saw that this was best achieved at the subject level. In one centre the desire for more student involvement was clearly a strong driver of the network:

‘Networks help to pull down the hierarchical divide between staff and students and encourage a partnership approach to learning.’

Typical Tactics of Engagement

Respondents stressed that a wide range of tactics needs to be used to gain staff involvement if a network is to be able to build capacity; as one respondent advised:

‘What you need is a ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom’ approach.’

The following list indicates tactics that have proved valuable:

- Fund small-scale research projects on curriculum issues or aspects of delivery
- Establish an named forum for the discussion and sharing of practice - may work particularly well within schools or subject groups
- Meetings for discussion and sharing of practice - e.g. lunchtime, late afternoon, one university has monthly Principal's Breakfasts at which staff can go along and present research or projects
- Form links with staff Induction activities and with PGCTLHE provision
- Hold annual staff Teaching and Learning conferences
- Fund posts (full or fractional) for research into pedagogic practice
- Run research skills and academic writing workshops - some of these could be at the weekend and residential. Follow up with offers of coaching if necessary.
• Offer coaching on specific problem areas for staff e.g. writing research bids

• Run Reading Groups where staff can test out draft research papers

• Informal chats over coffee

• Hold workshops and talks about specific curriculum issues - these work best if an outside speaker is invited along

• Fund and encourage collaborative research projects with students

• Build cross-disciplinary groups with shared interest

• Provide e-learning workshops and advisors for staff.

• Offer time and status for involvement in pedagogic research

• Involve staff in other universities in the locality

• Build international links - e.g. invite speakers to Teaching & Learning conferences

(d) Devise robust mechanisms for evaluation

The teams visited stressed the importance of devising a transparent and robust methodology for evaluating the success of a teaching and learning network’s activities. Given the pressure on resources in most universities the value added to a university by investment in a network had to be demonstrable. Staff at one or two centres felt that, in hindsight, they had under-estimated the importance of this factor and it had undermined the credibility of some of their activities. It was argued by several respondents that the inclusion of external reference points, experts from other universities, for example, in the evaluation process is particularly valuable in building respect and trust. Common criteria used to evaluate success included the rate of publications, improvement in student retention rates, attendance levels at events hosted by the network and the number of joint research activities. Lastly, an obvious point, disseminate the findings.

Consider Challenges

One team warned:
‘Pedagogic practice tends to drop to the bottom of the agenda because of other pressures that are more teaching related ... do not underestimate the challenge involved in building communities of pedagogic practice’.

The teams across all the universities visited identified the following as the most commonly occurring challenges to the establishment of a successful teaching and learning network:

- Accessing funds
- Finding time for staff to undertake activities and research
- Maintaining the momentum of the network once it is established
- Intellectual Property issues - some staff were resistant to sharing ideas because of the concern that ideas might be stolen
- The perception that more status is awarded to subject research results in a significant number of staff being reluctant to become involved in pedagogic research. Pedagogy is often seen as the ‘poor relation’.
- The complexity involved in the co-ordination of research projects
- The reluctance of staff to engage with staff university web sites
- The Resistors - there will always be those resistant to innovation and some of these might seek to undermine attempts to establish a community of pedagogic practice
- The need for patience is paramount as networks of teaching and learning take time to grow
5. Southampton Solent University Staff Survey

Author: Sean Wellington

The Staff Survey was administered using the QuestBack\(^1\) online survey engine. The survey was published from 8 June 2009 to 26 June 2009, with an e-mail reminder sent on 22 June 2009.

Responses were explicitly sought from all staff involved in teaching and supporting learning in the four faculties and LIS. As it was not possible to reliably indentify such staff, for example on the basis of role title, an e-mail invitation was sent to all staff with a Lotus Notes e-mail account (a total of 1046 e-mail invitations) with the following request:

**Subject:**

**Prize Draw for £100 - Support for Teaching, Learning and Pedagogic Research**

**Text:**

*Are you interested in teaching or supporting student learning?*

*As part of a teaching quality enhancement project, we have been investigating how a community of practice might usefully be established at Southampton Solent University in support of teaching, learning and pedagogic research.*

*To this end, we would be grateful if you would complete a short online survey. This should take approximately 10 minutes and your views will remain confidential. Everyone who completes the survey by Friday 26 June 2009 will be entered into a prize draw to win £100 of John Lewis vouchers.*

*If you require any further information please contact a member of the project team.*

*With thanks*

*[The Project Team]*

\(^1\) [http://questback.co.uk/](http://questback.co.uk/) [Accessed 19 September 2009]
The Prize Draw was an incentive to encourage staff to complete the survey. It was also possible to complete the survey anonymously, but without entry into the Prize Draw. 155 responses had been received by the closing date, however one response was incomplete and therefore not included in the subsequent analysis. Hence the results are based on 154 responses.

The response rate, based on 154 responses and a population of 1046, was therefore 15%. However this figure understates the true response rate as the 1046 invitations will include staff with no direct role in teaching or the support of student learning.

Responses were provided by 119 Academic Staff and 35 Support Staff, some relatively new to Higher Education and some with considerable (more than 15 years) experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Service</th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>ALL RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 15 years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Your current and future teaching and learning activities and research interests

1a. What are your current and future areas of interest?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALL RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>+/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
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<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical issues in educational research</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and teaching theory</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting published</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking teaching and research</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methodologies</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic misconduct</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity based learning</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended learning</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom based technology</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom practice</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL RESPONDENTS</strong></td>
<td>Now</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>3.60</td>
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<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student participation in learning</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible learning</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
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<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile learning</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate teaching</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem based learning</td>
<td>3.67</td>
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<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student assessment</td>
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<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student experience</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student retention</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work based and placement learning</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access and transition to HE</td>
<td>3.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and diversity (e.g. disability)</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your subject specific discipline</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering all respondents, the following current and future issues were perceived as particularly important: their particular subject discipline; encouraging student participation in learning; activity-based learning; student experience; and student feedback. It should be remembered that 77% of respondents were academic staff, hence the views of this group dominate when all respondents are considered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC STAFF</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>+/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>3.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
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<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and teaching theory</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting published</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linking teaching and research</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research methodologies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic misconduct</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blended learning</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom practice</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student participation in learning</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible learning</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
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<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile learning</td>
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<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem based learning</td>
<td>3.88</td>
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<td>Reflective practice</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.08</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student retention</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work based and placement learning</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access and transition to HE</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and diversity (e.g. disability)</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your subject specific discipline</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.59</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For academic staff the following current and future issues were perceived as particularly important: their particular subject discipline; encouraging student participation in learning; activity-based learning; student experience; and student feedback.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPORT STAFF</th>
<th>Now</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>+/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical issues in educational research</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and teaching theory</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting published</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linking teaching and research</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research methodologies</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic misconduct</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity based learning</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended learning</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom based technology</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom practice</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student participation in learning</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible learning</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile learning</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate teaching</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.37</td>
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<td>Problem based learning</td>
<td>2.94</td>
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<td>Reflective practice</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student assessment</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student experience</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student retention</td>
<td>3.43</td>
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<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work based and placement learning</td>
<td>2.91</td>
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<td>0.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access and transition to HE</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and diversity (e.g. disability)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your subject specific discipline</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support staff identified the following current and future issues as particularly important: learning support; flexible learning; independent learning; and encouraging student participation in learning. Activity-based learning was perceived as an area of increasing importance. Support staff also identified their own subject discipline as a key area of interest.
2. Supporting your teaching and learning activities and research interests

2a. To what extent would you welcome support with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support/Teaching Activity</th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing research teams / clusters</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding research partners</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster / workshop presentations</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refereeing</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methodology</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing bids / sourcing funding</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing books</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing book proposals</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing conference / journal</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was considerable overlap between the responses of the academic and support staff groups. Both groups prioritised support for collaborative learning and finding research partners. Academic staff also prioritised establishing research teams / clusters, while support staff indicated support for poster / workshop presentations.

2b. What skills could you offer a learning and teaching network at SSU? e.g. writing journal papers, preparing bids, writing book proposals, mentoring etc.

Almost all respondents identified one or more areas where they felt able to contribute. The following were cited most frequently:

- Bid writing
- Writing for publication
- Mentoring
- Research skills and methods
- Reflective learning
- Technology-assisted learning
- Collaborative and problem-based learning
- Innovative assessment practice

50
2c. Would you be willing to share your learning and teaching activities and research knowledge and collaborate:

Please click against as many as apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only with colleagues in your current discipline/faculty within SSU?</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With other disciplines / faculties within SSU?</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With other HE establishments?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With recognised professional bodies?</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With corporates / businesses?</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both groups of respondents indicated a willingness to share their work with colleagues from across the institution and also externally.

3. *How would a teaching and learning network work effectively at SSU? Your preferences:*

3a. When collaborating with others on learning and teaching activities and research, what format would you prefer?

Please click against as many as apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Away days</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading groups</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online activities and online information</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents indicated a preference for face-to-face meetings, workshops and seminars. Online activities and information were also rated highly, particularly by support staff.
3b. When should learning and teaching activities and research take place?

Please click against as many as apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunchtimes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evenings</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekends</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was strong support for events during working hours, with lunchtimes preferred, but some support for evening events.

3c. How often are you likely to be able to participate in the activities you’ve identified?

Please click against as many as apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six monthly</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was strong support for monthly events from both academic and support staff groups.

4. Other important considerations in developing your teaching and learning activities and research interests

4a. To what extent do you think extending your teaching and learning activities and research knowledge would help your professional development / career?
By Role:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>Support Staff</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that academic staff and support staff respondents believed that developing their skills and knowledge was important in career development terms. The academic staff respondents felt this was slightly more important than their support staff colleagues.

By Length of HE Service:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than a year</th>
<th>1-2 years</th>
<th>3-5 years</th>
<th>6-10 years</th>
<th>11-15 years</th>
<th>Over 15 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing skills and knowledge was seen as relatively more important by staff with between 1 and 10 years HE service. Perceived importance reduced for staff with longer periods of service (more than 10 years).

4b. The three key things that would be important to develop my learning and teaching activities and research knowledge would be (please state):

The following were cited most frequently:

- Opportunities for networking and collaboration
- Access to resources, including literature
- Support and guidance, including mentoring

4c. The three key challenges to develop my learning and teaching activities and research knowledge would be (please state):

The key challenge identified by the large majority of respondents was ‘time’, often linked to the pressure of other work such as a high teaching load. Help ‘getting started’ was also identified as a key challenge, along with a perceived need for recognition and support. Some respondents identified specific training and development needs, for example
research methods, bid writing, writing for publication and the use of specialist software such as NVivo.
6. Discussion

The central aim of the feasibility study was to identify the main issues that would influence the design and development of a Community of Learning within Southampton Solent University. The project had four objectives:

1. To research current academic literature with regard to pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice

2. To research current approaches and best practice within the wider academic community and relevant public and private institutions with regard to pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice

3. To evaluate the views of key stakeholders including SBS, FMAS, FTEC and WMA and staff groups including the PgC LTHE Community with regard to a Solent CoPP

4. To examine the full potential of myCourse to provide an online space to support the Solent CoPP

The central tenet of the community of learning approach is that it facilitates networks of members of staff who have common interests and aims. It is through these communities, both informal and formal, that staff are able to interact, communicate, learn from one another, solve problems and create new knowledge (Hildreth et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Key characteristics

- Voluntary membership
- Shared interest and expertise binding people together
- Creation of new, often tacit knowledge, in social context
- Fostering new approaches to problems
- Members value their collective abilities, learn from each other, help each other and share information
- Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) where newcomers learn from ‘old timers’ and in time newcomers progress from the peripheral to the full participation in the community

Learning communities can be organic, spontaneous and informal. Although fluid in nature, core drivers of the community are located at its centre. Citing the analogy of a spark and fire, Cambell & Uys (2007) suggest that it is the core membership that is critical to its
survival as it instigates and drives the community and continues to burn, encouraging participation from members and steering them toward achieving their goals.

It is argued that membership of learning communities cannot be made mandatory however this is not to preclude formal groups operating as effective communities. It is the organisation’s role to bring the right people together and provide an infrastructure that supports the community’s operation (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

The advancement of technology and the Internet, and the growth in the use of information communication technologies and computer-mediated communications offers the potential to create virtual or online communities of learning. Virtual communities share similar characteristics to traditional communities, but communication is supported through media such as telephone, teleconferencing, email, videoconferencing, newsgroups, databases, web sites and intranets. Virtual communities afford the possibility of bringing people together who are geographically remote, they also offer a quicker platform through which to build communities. However, they can be more transitory than more traditional communities and may develop without any central management or control. The effectiveness of virtual communities rests upon a number of factors (Gannon-Leary & Fountainha, 2007):

- the technological provision and the skills of members to use the technology
- the technologies ability to facilitate interaction between members
- the need for members to feel a sense of belonging
- the ability of members to identify others with similar interests and aims
- longevity of the community is needed to create trust, rapport and a true sense of ‘community’

In summary, the community of learning approach seeks to create opportunities for the sharing and development of best practice in teaching and learning and pedagogic inquiry by fostering multiple and overlapping communities of interested parties within the institution, whether that be through traditional communities, virtual communities or a combination of both.

**Benefits of the Community of Learning approach**

- Enhance teaching & Learning practices
- Foster generic research skills
- Tap into synergies
- Share best practice/Expertise
- Improve academic profile
• Encourage links between faculties, schools

The successful development of learning communities is dependent on the design of effective platforms through which staff with similar interests can develop ideas. They need to be supported with relevant infrastructure and systems.

6.1 Experience of Leading Practice Institutions

It is of fundamental importance to acquire powerful institutional backers from the initial design stage of the community of learning. Those seeking to develop such a community must have a convincing rationale for devoting resources to the further development of pedagogic practices. The benefits to the institution should be clearly articulated. Ensuring that the community of learning aligns with institutional priorities and presenting the concept as a problem solver for the institution is also helpful in acquiring senior management ‘buy in’ (for example, achieving improved National Student Survey results, enhancing employability, improving student feedback processes).

Inadequate commitment by senior management and/or funding may mean that any community of learning falters in the early stages. Funding should be sought at the outset for both the launch and ongoing costs of the community. In an environment of tightening budgets achieving a realistic amount of finance is challenging. The community of learning needs to be firmly embedded within the institutional processes, practices and structures with clear benefits to staff, including promotional routes identified for staff as a tangible incentive to participate. This is particularly important when attempting to gain staff support and involvement in the community and crucial in achieving any cultural shift needed in terms of the perceived ‘value’ of pedagogic inquiry. It is important to establish a strong identity for the community; one that should clearly contribute to the wider academic identity of the institution. Thought needs to be given to the best design for the community - the most advantageous location for central resources and the relationship between this centre and other hubs of activity within the network.

The development of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) offers further opportunities to engage staff in the community. The challenge here is to align interests and resources to support activities. Evidence suggests that whilst a VLE can be a key innovation, staff still prefer face-to-face interaction rather than on-line communication. Therefore any on-line provision is likely to be supplementary rather than the main vehicle for staff engagement. The strategic relationship between direct and on-line provision needs to be addressed in the initial design of the community. Further challenges include high staff workloads making it difficult to find time to participate in activities, staff concerns about
Intellectual Property issues, and maintaining the momentum of the community once it is established.

**Key issues to address at the design stage**

- Potential available resources including funding, physical space, staff to form a core team (in order to coordinate activities) and VLE platforms.
- Potential drivers for the community: Possibilities here cover tapping into existing staff development activities and the annual appraisal process, linking to Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Masters and Doctorate in Education programmes and also any Teaching Fellowships.
- A clear strategy timeline, goals and methods of evaluation should be formulated. Effective evaluation processes can be helpful in demonstrating and justifying the value that a community of learning can bring to the institution.
- A clear identity for the community of learning.
- Coherent communication strategy to support each stage of the implementation strategy. The strategy needs to identify the key messages, audience and communication tools and a timeline for delivery.

All the leading practice institutions stressed the need to utilise a wide range of tactics in order to involve staff in the community and build capacity, for example:

- Workshops and e-workshops
- Invited speakers
- Annual Teaching and Learning Conferences
- Seminars on aspects of pedagogic practice
- Writing residential
- Publications e.g. working paper series
- Mentoring programme
- Interdisciplinary projects
- Reading groups, perhaps linked with other local universities.

It is important to research staff/student/institutional agendas and ‘plug’ into these. A useful tactic is to align activities with the institutional quality enhancement agenda. For example, blended learning, improving formative assessment and the internationalisation of the curriculum are currently areas of focus. Ensuring that community activities support staff in their teaching and learning, curriculum development and involvement with institutional processes in a timely fashion is also an effective tactic. For example, using the VLE and new Web 2.0 technologies to enrich the student learning experience and supporting staff involved with course design, validation and other review events.
Identifying small-scale research projects to involve staff has been used effectively to ‘pump prime’ the community and can be particularly effective if such projects are cross school/faculty. Offering some form of status and/or remission for staff involvement is useful, as well as identifying ‘champions’ for projects and activities at school/faculty level.

In order to maximize the opportunity for staff to attend events such as seminars, workshops and reading groups, consider varying the time/day of the events (lunchtime, late afternoon, breakfast meetings etc).

Holding regular teaching and learning forums/conferences can be a useful tool to share best practice, showcase projects and expand staff involvement in the community. They are also a good opportunity to invite external guest speakers and staff from other HE institutions.

Developing a publication strategy has the combined effect of raising the profile of the community of learning and its individual members. Newsletters, e-newsletters, journals and working paper series are all useful tools. The experience of submitting work for in-house journals and working paper series’ can be a very valuable developmental experience for staff new to pedagogic research.

6.2 Southampton Solent University Staff Preferences for a Community of Learning

Academic and support staff identified the following current and future issues as particularly important: their particular subject discipline; encouraging student participation in learning; activity-based learning; and student experience. In addition, support staff emphasised student support, while academic staff prioritised student feedback.

In terms of the support that would be most helpful, academic and support staff respondents prioritised support for collaborative learning and finding research partners. Academic staff also identified support with establishing research teams / clusters, while support staff indicated support for poster / workshop presentations.

Almost all respondents identified one or more areas where they felt able to contribute skills or knowledge to a teaching and learning network. Respondents indicated a willingness to share their work with colleagues from across the institution and also externally.
Respondents indicated a preference for face-to-face meetings, workshops and seminars. Online activities and information were also rated highly, particularly by support staff.

There was strong support for events during working hours, with lunchtimes preferred, but some support for evening events.

There was strong support for monthly events from both academic and support staff groups.

Academic staff and support staff respondents believed that developing their skills and knowledge was important in career development terms, although perceived importance reduced for staff with longer periods of Higher Education service (more than 10 years).

Respondents identified the following key enablers: opportunities for networking and collaboration; access to resources, including literature; and support and guidance, including mentoring.

The key challenge identified by the large majority of respondents was ‘time’, often linked to the pressure of other work such as a high teaching load. Help ‘getting started’ was also identified as a key challenge, along with a perceived need for recognition and support.

The technology assessment found that the current VLE (myCourse) is perceived by staff primarily as a tool for supporting students’ learning. An alternative platform would therefore be desirable to support the online aspects of the Community of Learning. Members of the academy are increasingly familiar with social networking sites, for example Facebook. A social media environment would therefore seem to provide a feature-rich and accessible platform for the online community.

6.3 Estimating Costs

The project set out to identify the approximate costs for establishing and maintaining a community of learning. Major budget lines might therefore include:

- Staff costs
- Publicity and promotion
- Events
- Funding for particular initiatives and projects

Several of the Leading Practice institutions visited had invested heavily, with dedicated staff and real estate. However if there is no dedicated space/space charge the minimum annual cost can be estimated as follows:
Hence a total annual operating cost of £18,974, however this excludes any managements costs and the costs of specific initiatives or projects. For example, it likely that costs will be higher in the first year of operation due to the need for additional publicity and the development of the required social media environment.

6.4 Conclusions

There is broad support at Southampton Solent University for the establishment of a Community of Learning to support pedagogic research and share effective pedagogic practice.

Similar initiatives at other Higher Education Institutions are proving beneficial and attracting considerable interest (for example iPED at Coventry University).

The development of a successful Community of Learning will require time and persistence. A number of barriers and areas for particular attention have been identified from the literature and case study institutions. Awareness of these issues by the leaders of the proposed Community of Learning as Southampton Solent University will reduce the time needed for the network to become established and increase the return on investment.

6.5 Recommendations

1. Work should be continued to establish a Community of Learning at Southampton Solent University.

2. The following initiatives and activities should be prioritised:
   - A monthly series of lunchtime workshop sessions
   - An online presence supporting staff interactivity
   - The use of mentors to support staff inexperienced in pedagogic research
• A database to allow staff to share their research interests and identify opportunities for collaboration
• A pedagogic research journal, initially with articles published online
• Opportunities for researchers to present work in progress and receive feedback on their work
• Reading and peer support groups, for example staff studying for Doctorate of Education (EdD)

3. The Community of Learning should utilise a suitable social media environment, for example Elgg2, a flexible open-source product.

4. The Community of Learning should support and complement existing structures and activities.

5. At an early stage, indicators should be devised to measure and monitor progress.

6. A copy of this report should be provided to the staff responsible for the development and leadership of the Community of Learning.

2 http://elgg.org/ [Accessed 19 September 2009]
Annex 1 – Publications

Members of the project team have disseminated aspects of this work as follows:

HEA BMAF Annual Conference, 28-29 April 2009, Cardiff. Presentation: ‘Introducing a Community of Pedagogic Practice Within Southampton Solent University Combining Physical and Virtual Learning Environments To Further Staff and Student Learning Experiences - A Case Study’


2nd Institutional Research Conference: Building a Community for Institutional Research, 8-9 July 2009, Sheffield. Poster presentation: ‘Introducing a Community of Pedagogic Practice to Support Learning, Teaching and Research Strategies within Southampton Solent University’

Journal article, Educational Developments, ‘Development of a Community of Learning: A Feasibility Study’ [In press]
Annex 2 – Financial Information

The project was allocated a total budget of £14,675. The planned and actual expenditure was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Budget</th>
<th>Planned</th>
<th>Actual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>£12,675</td>
<td>£11,573.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-pay</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
<td>£1,817.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£14,675</td>
<td>£13,391.15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Annex 3 – Final Project Presentation

Presentation to the Southampton Solent University Staff Conference on 15 September 2009.

Slide 1

Solent Community of Pedagogic Practice

By Sara Briscoe, Anne Hill and Sean Wellington
15 September 2009

Slide 2

Project Team

- Sara Briscoe (BSE)
- Anne Hill (MAS)
- Lesley Macdonald (Research Assistant)
- Rob Mills (WMA)
- Sean Wellington (TEC)
- Lorry West (LIS)
Acknowledgements

- Lesley Macdonald
- The Project Team
- Our external advisor, Su White (University of Southampton)
- Colleagues at SSU, Coventry, Glasgow Caledonian, Oxford Brookes and Wolverhampton

Project Aims and Deliverables

To propose a model for a Community of Practice (CoP) that will:
- Help share good practice in teaching and learning
- Act a focus for pedagogic research
- Support institution-wide collaboration and engagement

Deliverables include:
- Fully-costed model
- Literature review
- Conference publication

Background

- A variety of staff (full time and part time) engaged in pedagogic inquiry spread across four main faculties: Faculty of Business, Sport & Enterprise; Faculty of Media, Arts & Society; Faculty of Technology; & Warsash Maritime Academy
- Isolated pockets of pedagogic expertise, some individuals geographically remote from the main campus, undertaking their own pedagogic activities
- Limited available organised forums for sharing best practice, for mentoring or for developing synergistic learning and teaching benefits

Need to support SSU in achieving medium-term objectives:
- To enable, support and value staff achievements in research, advanced professional practice and enterprise;
- To increase the quantity and quality of the research, advanced professional practice and enterprise;
- To enhance the reputation and/or earned income of the University through research, advanced professional practice and enterprise;
- To ensure that the research, advanced professional practice and enterprise of staff contribute to the enhancement of student learning through their integration into the curriculum;
Slide 6

**Why A Community of Pedagogic Practice?**

- A Community of Practice (CoP) can be defined as:
  - "A set of relations among persons, activity, and the world; over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice", (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p98).
  - "Groups of individuals who participate in a collection of activities, share knowledge and expertise, and function as an interdependent network over an extended period of time with the shared goal of furthering their practice or doing their work better", (Secundo et al, 2008, p91).
- A central principle is Legitimate Peripheral Participation - newcomers learn from ‘old timers’ by participating in limited tasks practiced in the community. Newcomers progress from peripheral to the community (apprentice) to full participation (master) (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- CoPs are an “Intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” with learning not simply situated in practice but as an integral part of practice that is “generative social practice in the lived in world”, (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kimber et al, 2000; Swan & Shea, 2005).
- Members have a common purpose and language, shared background and experience. Through the CoP they can interact, communicate, learn from one another, solve problems and create new knowledge (Hildreth et al, 1998).

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**Why A Virtual Community of Pedagogic Practice?**

- A virtual Community of Practice (vCoP) is “a network of individuals who share a domain of interest about which they communicate online”, (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007, p1).
- Technological advancement, the Internet and growth in ICTs has seen vCoPs growing in number and importance (Hildreth et al, 1998; Rogers, 2000; Stacey et al, 2004).
- Multi-faceted features of vCoPs:
  - Can overcome geographical boundaries
  - Can be quicker at building communities
  - Individuals can leave or join at any time without any consequences
  - They can develop without central governance (Milne and Callaghan (2006)).
- Successful vCoP: relevant content and focus; leadership and management; technology provision; free-flowing nature; members willing to share and participate online, collaborate and trust (Pemberton et al, 2007; Gannon-Leary and Fontainha, 2007).
- But, rely on human interaction and relationships (Cockburn et al, 2001) that create challenges in a virtual environment. vCoPs unable to completely compensate for lack of face-to-face interaction, therefore physical elements are also required (Secundo et al, 2008).

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**SSU CoPP Feasibility Study: Methodology**

**Aim & Objectives**

**Aim:**
To identify the main issues that would influence the design, construct and development of a CoPP within SSU.

**Objectives:**
1. To research current academic literature regarding pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice.
2. To research current approaches and leading practice within the wider academic community and relevant institutions with regard to pedagogic practice, learning networks and communities of practice.
3. To evaluate the views of key internal stakeholders with regard to introducing a SSU CoPP.
4. To examine the full potential of the SSU Intranet to provide an online space to support the SSU CoPP.
**Slide 9**

**SSU CoPP: Feasibility Study**

**Methodology**

1. Comprehensive literature review: Communities of Practice, learning networks, pedagogic practices and case study examples.

2. Research academic leading practice - visits to four HE institutions completed: qualitative, one-to-one interviews with academic managers, heads of departments and associate deans.

3. Evaluating SSU's key stakeholders' views:
   - Qualitative, in-depth one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders responsible for advanced scholarships, staff development and learning and teaching.
   - Online quantitative survey to establish current and future pedagogic learning preferences and intentions of all academic and support staff. 193 completed surveys.

4. Assessment of the potential of existing Intranet facilities to provide a secure, robust and user-friendly online learning environment.

**Slide 10**

**SSU CoPP Feasibility Study**

**Research Findings**

- Institutional backers and funding should be acquired before the CoPP's launch and introduction.

- A clear strategy, tactics, timeline and goals should also be developed against which progress can be measured, monitored and controlled.

- The CoPP should be embedded into institutional processes, practices and structures with promotion routes identified for staff as a tangible incentive to participate.

- Administrative and technical support need to be provided with collaboration between IT, technical staff, students and academics being encouraged.

- The physical aspects of the CoPP (e.g., workshops, forums and reading groups) should be developed and physical space should be provided, alongside the development of virtual tools (e.g., online discussion forums).

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**BENEFITS OF CoP approach**

- Enhance T & L - student experience

- Foster generic research skills

- Tap into synergies

- Share best practice/Expertise

- Improve academic profile

- Encourage links between faculties
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**CHALLENGES**

- Difficulty & time involved in establishing a vibrant community of practice!
- Intellectual property issues
- Not all staff value T & L research
- Cultural shift needed
- Pulling together research from across the network
- Difficulty of finding enough funds
- Teaching loadings
- Inexperience of staff?
- Level of support

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**TACTICS**

- Encourage ownership in schools - identify “champions”/leaders
- Need to research staff/student/institutional priorities and agendas and “hook” into these
- Frame Community of Practice as a problem-solver for staff
- Identify small scale research projects to involve staff
- Consider rewards for involvement in the community
- Consider dissemination - publication strategy; e journal?, newsletter? Posters?
- Consider role of PGTLHE
- Establish links with other institutions - especially locally

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**CoPP - possibilities?**

- Research workshops - fosters rigorous approach
- Seminars on aspects of pedagogic practice
- Writing residencies
- Working paper series
- Mentoring programme
- “Speed dating”
- Interdisciplinary projects
- Reading groups
- Away days
- Online forums
Slide 15

Quantitative findings (1)
- Online survey of SSU staff ‘interested in teaching or supporting student learning’
- Administered to staff in all four faculties and LIS, 8-26 June 2009
- 154 responses: 119 Academic Staff and 35 Support Staff
- Some respondents relatively new to higher education, and some with considerable experience (more than 15 years)
- Strong support for the formation of a learning and teaching network: respondents identified a wide range of knowledge and skills that they could personally contribute (e.g. mentoring, bid writing, writing for publication etc.)
- Respondents also identified the kinds of support they would find most helpful

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Quantitative findings (2)
Current and future teaching and learning/research interests:
Academic Staff
- Your subject specific discipline
- Encouraging student participation in learning
- Activity based learning
- Student experience
- Student feedback
Support Staff
- Learning support
- Flexible learning
- Encouraging student participation in learning
- Independent learning
- Activity based learning

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Quantitative findings (3)
Respondents would particularly welcome support with:
Academic Staff
- Finding research partners
- Establishing research teams / clusters
- Collaborative learning
Support Staff
- Poster / workshop presentations
- Finding research partners
- Collaborative learning
Quantitative findings (4)

- Preferred method of working:
  - Face-to-face meetings
  - Workshops
  - Seminars
  - Online
  - Preference for monthly activities, during working hours

Recommendations

- Develop a Community of Practice to support pedagogic practice and research at SSU
- Develop a clear strategy, tactics, timeline and goals. Measure and monitor progress
- Ensure adequate resources are committed to launch and maintain the network
- Use face-to-face events, supported by online technologies as appropriate
- Address topical issues and concerns of staff

Project outputs

- HEA BMAF Annual Conference - 28-29 April 2009, Cardiff:
  - ‘Introducing a Community of Pedagogic Practice Within Southampton Solent University Combining Physical and Virtual Learning Environments To Further Staff and Student Learning Experiences - A Case Study’
- SEDA Spring Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference Underpinning Academic Practice with Research and Scholarship - 7-8 May 2009, Brighton:
  - ‘Issues in the Development of a Community of Pedagogic Practice’
- 2nd Institutional Research Conference: Building a Community for Institutional Research - 8-9 July 2009, Sheffield:
  - ‘Introducing a Community of Pedagogic Practice to Support Learning, Teaching and Research Strategies within Southampton Solent University’
- In Progress: Educational Developments (Journal article)
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**Future work**

- Solent Pedagogic Research Network Project:
  - Initiate a CoP to support pedagogic research and share good pedagogic practice across the University (extending opportunities to partner institutions).
  - A monthly series of lunchtime workshop sessions to address topical issues
  - An online presence, with active discussion and debate
  - The use of mentors to support staff inexperienced in pedagogic research
  - A searchable database to allow staff to share their research interests & identify opportunities for collaboration
  - A pedagogic research journal, initially with articles published online
  - Opportunities for researchers to present work in progress and receive feedback on their work

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**ANY QUESTIONS?**