

LSIS Flexibility and Innovation Fund - Project report

Understanding the potential role of membership organisations in the sustainable spread of innovation

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A note of thanks

Thanks are owed to LSIS for funding this scoping study, and to all those who have supported this project including colleagues at LSIS and IfL and the project steering group (Appendix E), and especially those who gave so generously of their time to complete the on-line survey, take part in interviews, and attend the consultation workshop.

Key findings

- Innovation must be defined as ‘change for the better’ rather than as mere ‘novelty’ or ‘change for change’s sake’.
- Membership organisations have a key role to play in the cost effective spread of innovation.
- The best ways to spread innovation are by individual mentoring between colleagues in the same organisation, peer support, and informal networking between practitioners. But:
 - innovation can only flourish if the organisational culture is right ;
 - changing an organisation's culture to one that supports innovation has to be done from the inside;
 - what colleagues are really short of is the time to innovate; this matters more than money.

Introduction

1. In July 2009 ALT initiated a discussion with LSIS and Becta which focused on the subject matter of this project. It was agreed that the study proposed by ALT, and which became the centre of this small-scale project, would shed useful light on many of the issues identified at the meeting. Subsequently ALT made a formal proposal to the LSIS Flexibility and Innovation Fund to undertake the project. This was approved and work began in March 2010 and concluded in October 2010, with this report finalised during November 2010. The bulk of the project work was conducted by Seb Schmoller (chief executive of ALT), Kevin Donovan (independent consultant), and Rachel Harris (evaluator).

Project Summary

2. Agencies such as Becta, the Higher Education Academy, and JISC have commissioned or do commission work relating to learning technology and within the broad category of “spreading innovation through provider networking and development”. This project aimed to understand the conditions under which such activities can be undertaken both cost-effectively and sustainably by membership organisations.

Specific Aims and Intended Outcomes:

3. The project aims were:
 - to lay the ground for better and more cost-effective support for learning innovation;
 - to enable funders better to address the issue of the long term sustainability of innovation.
4. The project examined two related issues in the spread of innovation, namely:

- How to make such spread self-sustaining.
- The role of membership organisations in spreading innovation.

5. The findings of the study will support the planning of innovation programmes related to learning technology and more widely. The focus of this project was on improving the overall effectiveness (efficiency and cost-effectiveness), reach, and sustainability of innovation programmes, with anticipated learning from the project being transferable to other organisations so that the innovation programmes of the future can be designed to draw explicitly and directly on the capabilities and connections of membership organisations.

Background

6. The study was closely aligned to priorities set out in the 2009 National Improvement Strategy for the further education (FE) sector (NIS). Specifically it matched two key NIS principles: “Every single member of staff is a professional – they own what they do and take pride in it”, and “The greatest effective use is made of sector expertise”.

7. The project was supported by the Institute for Learning (IfL) which was involved in steering the project, with the Deputy Chief Executive of IfL co-opted onto a steering group the other members of which were the members of the ALT Further Education Committee (see Appendix E).

Rationale

8. Large funded programmes and Government agencies come and go but membership organisations are likely to remain over time. What is the role of such organisations in the sustainability and/or exit strategies for big programmes when the funding ends?

9. Some programmes are one-off interventions that do not need to be sustained; others need to be embedded into practice. Realistically this may need a “lightweight” support structure to maintain the work, keep it on the agenda and ensure it is up-dated. Membership bodies have a potentially important role in this and could do it economically, as it is often in their members’ interests to sustain support in the long term.

10. Could programme specifications allow commercial suppliers to support membership organisations, for example, by allowing them to show in-kind matching funds from theirs and their members’ time?

11. To deal with the competition among membership bodies for contracts and work, could agencies encourage more joint working between membership organisations and/or develop a common approved register for bodies and individuals who could work for them or other providers on improvement and development activities. What is the feasibility of different models of procurement and partnership?

Project processes

12. An online survey (see Appendix A) elicited 24 completed responses from 23 organisations operating in or having an interest in the field of learning technology. These included membership organisations (11), suppliers of services (3), learning providers (3), agencies or non-departmental public bodies (3) and responses as an individual from a relevant organisation in some of these categories (2).

13. The membership category included bodies representing individuals (thus UCU, the cross-sector trade union), institutions (the FE sector 157 Group and AoC),

and professional interests (eg SCONUL). HE was represented alongside FE by the views of funders (HEFCE and SFC) as well of institutions in England and Scotland. The full list is shown in an appendix.

14. The survey was designed as an appropriate substitute for a more extensive range of interviews and it was directed at a deliberately restricted audience.

15. For all but a small minority of respondents technology in learning was a large part of their own role, as was innovation and its spread. Colleagues specified their involvement in externally funded innovation programmes in the technology in learning domain which included in roles such as:

- A commercial software provider
- Becta network member
- Becta project worker
- Becta events and meetings
- Becta research project
- College project manager
- EU projects involvement
- FE sector organisations seminars and conferences
- National project manager
- National project involvements
- National projects steering group member
- NIACE programme trainer
- Programme funder
- Programme facilitator
- Programme manager
- Project consultant
- And indirectly in an organisation with such involvement

18. Colleagues described themselves as a paid official (6), senior manager (6), policy person (5), manager (4), elected officer or role-holder (3), ordinary member (1), practitioner (1) as well as possibly having other roles and functions.

19. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with stakeholders, whose views are summarised below, followed by a consultation workshop to discuss a report in draft. Regular email updates were provided to the project steering group and there were monthly highlight reports to the funder.

20. Evaluation was undertaken by an external evaluator whose report is available as an appendix.

Innovation and education: the debate

21. The project arose from a perception that changing political and economic circumstances would *de facto* require membership and other organisations to assume a higher profile in professional and organisational development. This fitted with and was confirmed by the direction of thinking in much publication and discussion surrounding educational innovation.

22. Some examples are given below:

Innovation is a delicate plant, which thrives in a favourable climate. It grows in stages. It begins with the perception that something needs to change, stimulating the bright ideas about what might be done. Each idea is elaborated and put to an early test, and then either dropped because it proves to be deficient or further supported because it promises to work. Once proved, it is disseminated to those people or places where it can be used to advantage. There are, in short, three key phases in innovation or knowledge creation: the generation of the idea, its application in practice, and its transfer into widespread adoption. In each phase, innovation can easily be stifled. Each phase, not just the generation of the original idea, requires creativity. Elaborating an idea and subjecting it to test requires another form of creativity, as does knowing how to transfer the newly created knowledge so that it is widely adopted by those who may be wedded to older practices. The process of knowledge creation involves risk-taking: there cannot be innovation that is risk-free. The climate that is most inimical to innovation is a blame culture, which both discourages the creation of new knowledge and undermines the courage needed to take the process through the high-risk phases of application and transfer.¹

The actual processes of innovation (for example the thinking, creativity, and collaboration which may be involved) provide a mechanism to stimulate improvement, whether that is in techniques or productivity. Risk-taking and radical thinking are common features of innovation. It is possible to produce models of the process of innovation that encompass a cyclical or dialectical process of (for example) planning, implementation and review, followed by improvement, dissemination, and further experimentation. But what does innovation involve? If it is organic or dialectical it cannot be 'done' to people or organisations, it has to be grown in a collective/collegiate way. Mechanisms need to be in place to enable organisations to examine the process of innovation (not just the nature of specific innovations) and learn how to spread related understanding. To maintain momentum, this requires some form of innovation-related knowledge capture and management within and outside the organisation. Innovation does not occur in a vacuum: the climate that supports innovation is vital. ... if innovation was likened to a new plant, then it needed the 'soil' of recognition and empowerment to take root, the 'rain' of resources to grow, the 'sunlight' provided by leadership to flourish and grow strong. Leadership is the key to developing the climate of innovation. Part of this means that good leaders need to demonstrate excitement for innovative teaching and learning. If they do they can add momentum to change.²

¹ Hargreaves D H (2003). Education epidemic: transforming secondary schools through innovation networks. London: Demos. p33

² Donovan Kevin (2006), Innovate or else? The dynamics of innovation in teaching and learning in the learning and skills sector. London: LSDA. P6

The overwhelming majority of innovation experts want EU structural funds to be used to get innovative products and services to the market, according to a new survey. As the European Commission readies its new innovation plan, a consensus is also forming around the need to slash bureaucratic procedures and boost venture capital funding.³

... the challenges that 'grass roots' e-learning initiatives face in trying to become sustainable. A cross-institutional study focused on local, rather than centrally driven, initiatives. A number of successful e-learning innovations were identified that had been driven by capable teachers seeking solutions to real educational problems. However, most of these remain in a high-risk category for institutions and offer poor rewards to their creators. While they may attract grant funding, these initiatives are typically not well supported in other important ways. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 staff in various academic and support roles from the tertiary sector in New Zealand, who were nationally recognised as e-learning leaders. Analysis of their responses revealed both institutional and cultural barriers to long-term sustainability. The following influences on sustainability were identified and discussed: supportive organisational structures, a vision shared by all and staff accountability. The paper proposes that not all initiatives are sustainable and offer practical strategies for achieving diffusion and continuity through collective action. The paper concludes that there is a need for cross-functional collaboration to accommodate different and sometimes conflicting perspectives. This is just one aspect of the culture change that research shows is needed for e-learning to transform, rather than sit uncomfortably alongside, institutional practice.⁴

Getting leadership right is key to successful, radical innovation... Having the right pedagogical approach can make all the difference in the classroom... Engaging the community in learning by using new sources of support, within and beyond the school, can improve life chances significantly. .. Systems need to change and adapt to allow innovation to flourish...⁵

We envision a three-pronged approach to sustained impact at scale: Seeding "disruptive" innovations: We will target new ideas that hold the greatest promise for improving the odds for low-income young adult learners. Primarily, we will be looking to "harvest" from the innovations that are emerging from the field. However, in a few areas, mostly in technology-related and new delivery model areas, we will be encouraging new innovations to learn what works and shows the greatest potential. Transplanting success: We will then share the most promising of those innovations with dozens of colleges, being sure to maintain their impact on student outcomes. This is where the bulk of our grant making will be over the next five years, as it will take some time to replicate these programs and allow them to demonstrate success beyond their original test sites. Going to scale: Once the success of these programs is documented, we will disseminate them across hundreds of colleges.⁶

We should think of society as being like a dry stone wall or a masonry arch, holding together without social cement. The task of Government is to create the environment in which the social norms and institutions which enable reciprocity

³ General Electric (GE) 'Innovation Barometer', an independent poll of 240 opinion leaders on EU innovation policies. StrategyOne: Brussels: September 2010. <http://tiny.cc/kgvmu>

⁴ Gunn Cathy (2010). Sustainability factors for e-learning initiatives. ALT-J: Vol 18: No 2: July 2010.

⁵ The Innovation Unit: <http://www.innovationunit.org/educationandchildren>

⁶ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Documents/technology-in-postsecondary-success.pdf>

*can flourish. Second, it clarifies what those institutions are and how they work. By using game theory and neurology, it helps us realise that they are enforcement mechanisms and arenas for reciprocity. A role for Government must be in protecting the institutions sustaining beneficial equilibria, and taking apart the institutions sustaining malign ones. There will be disagreement about which equilibria are which, and politicians need to be clear about the values for which they stand. However, if Government is to maintain reciprocal altruism and co-operation, this approach helps us to better understand what is at stake and what it can do to help. This exciting new interdisciplinary endeavour is helping us improve our understanding of society so that the next Conservative Government will be able to genuinely foster a better society based on stronger institutions.*⁷

23. And see other work⁸⁹¹⁰¹¹

Findings

24. The headlines/key findings from the *survey* included that:
- membership organisations have a key role to play in the cost effective spread of innovation;
 - innovation can only flourish (be sustained and spread) if the organisational culture is right ;
 - changing an organisation's culture to one that supports innovation has to be done from the inside;
 - what we are really short of is the time to innovate; this matters more than money; and:
 - the best ways to spread innovation are by individual mentoring between colleagues in the same organisation, peer support, and informal networking between practitioners.
25. The *interviews* revealed that:
- membership organisations have a key role in the spread of innovation, especially as national agencies and advisory bodies disappear;
 - peer support and other mechanisms of sharing and coaching are vital but within a culture which builds and reinforces innovation;
 - such mechanisms need to include events and resources which engage; but:
 - active joint practice development is clearly better than passive receipt or sharing of ideas; while:
 - innovation is difficult unless it chimes with the trend of officially-sanctioned development; and:
 - all of the above, and particularly membership organisations, can preserve and utilise the legacy of previous innovations and developments.

⁷ David Willetts <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/PublicEvents/events/2008/20071128t1633z001.aspx>

⁸ <http://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/the-role-of-professionals-in-times-of-scarce-resourcing>

⁹ <http://www.3s4.org.uk/events/the-future-of-membership-in-the-vcs>

¹⁰ <http://flux.futurelab.org.uk/2010/06/06/back-to-the-future-2-the-big-bang-continues/>

¹¹ <http://www.slideshare.net/adfigueiredo/innovating-in-education-educating-for-innovation>

26. The *consultation workshop* discussed a draft of this report and suggested ways in which the text and its conclusions could be improved and amplified. It also noted the need, either by further work or by re-examining previous studies, to clarify or overcome some perceptions (for example the relationship of funding and inspection to improvement) and assertions (for example that time not money is a key lever of change), and to pursue the ways to achieve change rather than simply identify the need.

27. The *workshop* and the *interviews* asserted the nature of innovation as 'change for the better' and emphasised the need for membership organisations to operate at the level of both staff room and institution as well as strategically in their support for culture change. The issues are different in the different contexts and therefore demand relevant interventions.

Detailed results

Survey responses

28. The survey responses¹² (see Appendices A and B) showed overwhelming support for the basic hypothesis that membership organisations (MOs) have a key role to play in the cost effective spread of innovation (with a score of 4.13).

29. Related comments included that:

- The project was 'well-timed' given the on-going but sometimes not sufficiently recognised role of MOs which 'are in a good position to support peer-to-peer structures' and their crucial role 'needs to be accepted'.
- 'Real and living connections with the learners are vital to the effective spread of innovation. I guess membership organisations are generally better placed than others to have reliable connections'.
- And noting that: 'Membership bodies are trusted by members and non members' as they are seen to exist to further their members' interests and the interests of related learners.
- A respondent highlighted the symbiotic nature of (for example) trade union membership with the institutions where members work: 'Given that the organisational culture of the institution is in UCU's view a prime determinant of the "how" of embedding innovation, there is a clear role for UCU at both national (QAA, OfSTED) and institutional level. In this respect, ICT is no different from other forms of curriculum innovation or change'.
- But: 'Anyone who can spread innovation in an acceptable and easily digested manner should not be dissuaded'. Although: 'It depends on whether the "innovation" is good or bad. We shall support good innovations and vigorously fight bad ones. So far, about 80% of "innovations" that I encountered in my professional life were substandard, unusable and unworkable'.
- And it is possible that 'some of [a] group stifle innovation while some promote it'.
- Responses showed close correlation between the perceived best ways to spread innovation in the technology field. These included individual mentoring between colleagues in the same organisation, peer support, and informal networking

¹² The survey allowed for some free text responses but also choices on a numerical scale 1-5 where 5 represented "to a great extent", and 1 represented "to a negligible extent". Thus a score (see below) of 4+ represented overwhelming agreement, 3.5 very strong agreement and 3+ strong agreement.

- between practitioners (all 3.88).
- These were closely followed by individual mentoring between colleagues in different organisations, attendance by staff at "how to" or "best practice" events, and structured communities of practice including exchange visits and peer-based networking (all 3.75).
 - Specific examples of all the above were cited (see below).
 - Then came (in descending but close order) provision of small-scale earmarked funding for particular technologies or approaches (3.63), access to advice from trusted sources (3.58), use of "champions" (3.54), and access to relevant "best practice" case studies (3.5).
 - Also favoured but slightly less so were internal training and development programmes (3.46), access to current research (3.21), benchmarking (3.13), and provision of large-scale earmarked funding for particular technologies or approaches (also 3.13).
 - The only method which scored less than 3 was competitions and awards (2.96).
 - Colleagues elaborated on the above and cited practical examples of other approaches to spreading innovation in the technology field of which they had experience and believed to be effective including the following (some of which have been edited slightly for sense).
 - 'A certificate in blended learning offered to the public and members'.
 - 'Internal competitions (eg. e-Olympics used in Scotland) and innovation funds to support innovation internally'.
 - 'Generic mailing lists, whilst relatively old in terms of a communication method, still offer a useful mechanism to promote new ideas to a wide range of individuals'.
 - 'Use of an internal VLE to archive and spread documentation, experiences and good practice'.
 - Many comments were made in favour of 'technology-based communities of practice' and 'active communities of practice are particularly effective' with one respondent saying that: 'communities of practice often in the past pumped primed by face-to-face events have shaped my career and growth: ILT champions training, the techmeetup events, and fringe events at ALT-C etc'.
 - Other very specific communities found to be useful included: 'MoLeNET, working with the Sheffield College, Making IT Personal, Joining the DOTs peer support programme for Digital Outreach Trainers, and CAMEL as used in the South Yorkshire e-inclusion projects'.
 - 'In my opinion the e-Guides approach has been the most successful and sustained. Here, the three days course has been underpinned by pedagogical approaches to the use of technology and the recognition and management of change. With lots of time for hands on, discussion and networking - those attending also benefited from trainers who coached and mentored the participants in such a way that they were just guides by the side - rather than sages on the stage'.
 - One was 'in favour of 'whole institution' approaches to embedding the use of ICT in learning that are negotiated with staff, an approach which does not necessarily preclude any of the approaches outlined. We try to glean as much information on innovation from members to develop a 'standing on the shoulders of giants' approach to policy advice and industrial negotiation on terms and conditions affected by embedding ICT in teaching and learning in FE and HE'.
 - Another institution provided 'funding to second academics to work on projects within their own discipline. Our teaching fellowship scheme provides space for academics to work on innovative projects'.
 - 'Events offer a number of opportunities - presentation of case studies is often more

dynamic in that the presenter may be asked questions about the approach, lessons learned etc and be more open than they may be able to be with a written case study. Also there are semi-structured discussions such as birds of a feather sessions which permit an open exchange of ideas’.

- ‘Peer-led presentations at conferences have rapidly spread the innovative use of technology. Two examples are the outsourcing of student email and the use of apps to deliver information to a student population. Although outsourcing email isn't at the very cutting edge from a technical point of view (and may be commonplace in the private sector) the idea wasn't accepted within HE until relatively recently... acceptance came about because it was communicated well. A number of informal, face to face, free exchanges which cover benefits, pit falls and a detailed comparison with in-house provision have spread a "new" idea very effectively’.
- ‘Webinars and conferences’.
- One described a coordinated approach to ‘every aspect of our programme, from the selection and development of tutors to curriculum design; to accreditation; to course development etc. Programmes are written and shaped by teams of practitioners who know the learners and the needs of the workplace, so there is a holistic approach to what we do. This ensures buy-in across the stakeholders, meaning that innovation can quickly be trialled, amended and integrated. Online learning is a good example but there are countless others, from accreditation and assessment strategies to patterns of course provision. We spend resources on tutor development rather than high priced one-size-fits-all packages, which makes for continuous improvement and innovation’.
- ‘Benchmarking? If this is informative only and based on solid data, then this could be useful. If it supports prescription and/or is based on subjective judgements, then absolutely not’.
- However one colleague made the fundamental point that: ‘The adoption of innovative technologies only works when there is clarity over the problems, and opportunities, to be resolved by its use. There has to be an incentive to adopt innovation, but in some senses there also has to be level of “compulsion”’.
- Absorption, into teaching, of professional research tools? It is actually a very good question -- it made me to realise that [in my subject area] real innovations that left lasting effect were driven by the professional research community, not by [subject] educators. This perhaps differs from what is happening in other disciplines’.
- And, related to this, another noted the need for: ‘Embedding messages in related projects / reports / events. Essentially placing the innovation in a specific learning context’.
- In contrast one respondent wrote that ‘All of these approaches have been tried and none of them have proved very effective. Much current research is flawed or driven by interested parties and very large amounts of money have been wasted on misconceived, centrally initiated projects which are then not allowed to be seen to fail, even though they deliver very little. Training can only be a lever for change if (a) there is clear evidence that the so called "best practice" does in fact deliver results reliably (there is very little of this available, and (b) that it is desired by the trainees. Much misdirected training attempts to transfer practice that has been piloted by technology enthusiasts to the technically ignorant and unmotivated - this is also doomed to failure. The fundamental misconception of the Becta years - which the range of options offered [in the survey] seems to me to replicate - is that teachers can innovate without the underpinning of an innovative learning technology industry. Successful commercial companies operating in a competitive, user-driven market know how to create replicable products that work out of the box

- enthusiasts don't. Innovation in classroom practice will then follow, working synergistically with commercial innovation. The spread of best practice amongst teachers is also important - but in nearly all cases should be done on a peer-to-peer basis, and not on some authority setting themselves up to determine what best practice is'.

- Another added: 'I think it's a mistake to try to generalise too much about 'what works' in terms of spreading innovation in technology. Different people will respond to different approaches, and a particular context and set of circumstances can make innovation possible when another cannot. In general, people need to be given time to experiment and need to be able to build upon established relationships with colleagues or peers who can help them to understand the potential of technology to enhance learning and teaching. Evidence is needed (in the form of case studies etc) to support the case for change. As we would expect, some individuals respond to written evidence whilst others prefer to be involved in seminars, workshops or conversations. Overall, there is a need for a combination of human intervention, information and incentives (such as funding or prizes) to legitimise engagement with innovation'.
- Where else, apart from their own organisation, would survey respondents go for support with ideas about innovation and/or its implementation?
- ALT (9) and JISC (7) were the most cited, followed by:
- Becta (4), colleagues (4), existing learning technology-related communities of practice (4), the HE Academy (3), members (2), Molenet (2), other institutions (2) and Google (2)
- There were single references each to the Internet generally, Twitter, a network of innovative collaborators, academic research, monitoring private sector provision, European programmes, Government agencies, departmental reviews, conferences and journals. Specific organisational sources included: IMS GLC, eLN, Towards Maturity, Learning and Skills Group, 157 IT Group, the Technology Strategy Board, as well as to FutureLab, Scotland's College, D Net and the BBC Digital Planet Podcast
- There was little strong agreement with the assertion that 'Left to their own devices, learning providers tend not to innovate' (2.71).
- By contrast colleagues agreed that innovation can only flourish if the organisational culture is right (4.25), that changing an organisation's culture to one that supports innovation has to be done from the inside (4.08), and that what we are really short of is the time to innovate; this matters more than money (3.92).
- They agreed, but less strongly, that membership organisations tend to be trusted more than agencies (3.71), the trouble with funded innovation programmes is that, when the money runs out, innovation ceases (3.42), the biggest challenge is to get middle-of-the-road practitioners to innovate (3.38), and there is sometimes a perception that the funding and inspection regimes do not encourage providers to innovate (3.17).

30. These answers were nuanced variously:

- 'We don't utilise public funding; all projects and initiatives are funded from within the organisation'. Although others noted that 'Funding practices sometimes place limits on innovation' and 'What we need now is funding to consolidate any innovation we have undertaken in recent years'. Although 'the real trouble with government-funded innovation is that the innovations that they create are normally completely unrealistic in the first place'.
- 'External challenge and comparison can stimulate innovation; organisations need to look beyond themselves. Often what is needed is a challenge to existing thinking which is tied up with org culture'. And 'the will and ability on the part of an

- organisation to challenge its own assumptions - outsiders can help this'. But 'making elearning more explicit as a desirable in inspection docs would help'.
- 'Culture change needs to happen on two fronts: it needs to permit innovation and experimentation but also ensure that ideas that do develop are appropriately resourced when they become production systems'.
 - Although 'we have become obsessed with cultural change without understanding it. Most of our efforts in the last five years have promoted and entrenched the status quo and those that challenge it have been dismissed as irritants or mavericks. Many current ideas around the "Big Society" will exacerbate this'.
 - 'The communication of an innovation or innovative practice can be as important as the innovation itself. An un-communicated, un-celebrated innovation will only benefit the institution it has come from. Widely communicating the outputs of an innovation project, positive or negative, is vital so that a whole community can learn. Some sort of overview is helpful too, to see if there is any cohesion between for example a set of projects that would lead to a secondary stage of innovation'.
 - 'Organisations will increasingly need internal support to innovate or sustain innovation. We are now entering a period where we are doing 2/3 people's jobs so, if external organisations provide consultancy, it should be given practically as well as [being] advisory'.
 - 'Time is the key problem. For this reason funding grants need to provide space to academics to allow them this valuable time'. And 'actually time and money are separate entities. Money IS needed, if only to release staff from teaching and other duties. Time is needed for colleagues to a) learn (maybe a day's course?) and b) practice/develop their learning (maybe an equal amount of time is given for them to complete a cascade or development project that helps to embed their new learning?)'
 - But, claimed another: 'The time [justification] is a modern day "dog ate my homework" excuse. Many people are comfortable (lazy) with the status quo. Cultural change often happens when organisations are under a degree of pressure. The current unreasonable budgetary pressure will not create good innovation'. 'Everyone operates within their own logic bubble. The answer to a lack of innovation is to make learning providers more accountable for results, incentivising them to innovate'.
 - 'Learning providers do not have the technical expertise to innovate without parallel commercial innovations (neither do the bureaucratic or academic organisations which seek to force innovation). Successful innovations will spread - and that is where peer-to-peer communications are required'.

Telephone interviews

31. The telephone interview responses (see Appendix C) also gave overwhelming agreement to the basic hypothesis that membership organisations have a key role to play in the cost effective spread of innovation. Interviewees took the opportunity to stress related factors, especially that innovation can only flourish if officially and culturally sanctioned and supported; and that the mechanisms for actually spreading innovation have been identified but are not straight-forward and need careful construction. Thus:

- In relation to membership organisations, which are currently needed more than ever and well-placed to support change, some are more effective than others. If they don't work towards innovation then they certainly should do so and are uniquely so placed as their own agendas are often exactly a reflection of their sectors' values.

- Membership implies some form of commitment to the aims and activities and even organisational membership bodies can offer opportunities for individual involvement (eg institutional membership can be translated into mailings to numbers of individuals).
- Organisations must look outwards to other like minded bodies to build support networks. The interests of non-members and the offer to potential members should be considered, so 'progressive' rather than 'self-interested' bodies are likely to be most favoured by funders.
- A template could be produced to allow organisations to involve their members (and others) in an effective way. Rather than simply more centrally supplied resources this would involve pilot schemes in which teachers are engaged and can innovate and experiment, collaborate to solve problems, practice what they preach by cascading the results to peers and students, and ensure that national agencies took notice and acted upon the results.
- Face-to-face activity is the most effective but, when conferences and large initiatives are few, organisations can foster dialogue and smaller or different kinds of meetings, including on-line. When there are events, organisations can simply site a table or reserve a lunch space where people can meet to discuss shared interests.
- If a body does make awards a condition can be the production of a 'how to' guide for reporting, use and dissemination at linked events and via the web.
- Funders might see such organisations as merely another level of bureaucracy so the secret is to make their function seamless and relatively invisible. But some intermediary is necessary as no one institution has the infrastructure to replace the resources and services which will disappear as support agencies are closed. Any organisation whose *raison d'être* is innovation (and, in this case, technology) is well placed.
- The right processes have to be identified and appropriate mechanisms adopted to make a large/holistic institutional impact. To translate theory into practice and reality requires a strong leadership ethos with a commitment to innovation and a relevant institutional mission where processes are open and transparent. Institutional strategies should encompass staff ownership, shared responsibilities – and 'quick wins'. Technology has to be in daily use by all
- Treatment of staff as well as students needs to be learner centred and staff need to have the time and space to experiment in an environment where they can take risk, challenge and be involved in decisions.
- Effective innovation programmes (such as the Technology Exemplar Network and Beacons) have focussed on how theory can become practice and in which practitioners can make real sense of what is otherwise proposed.
- MoLeNET was effective in one institution as it reflected the OfSTED recommendation to spread innovation widely and across sites and because its approach matched quality assurance structures of target setting and dissemination. It also used excellent trainers and training sessions.
- Peer review and acting as critical friends can provide a safe framework to share and demonstrate best practice if an institution's ethos supports research translated into continuing professional development (CPD). But great care has to be taken in spreading innovation. Research shows that 'sharing' innovation through 'cascading' simply doesn't work and that only joint practice development produces meaningful results. Examples which support this include various work by Black, Fielding and Coffield¹³. There are examples of national programmes which show

¹³ For example only Frank Coffield's William Alderson Memorial Trust Lecture "Education before Business", November 2009: <http://www.wea.org.uk/yh/new%20pages/Frank%20Coffield%20Lecture.htm>

- starkly how to and how not to proceed.
- The joint practice model relies on communities trying out, evaluating and crafting approaches and testing them in the context of their own practice and certainly more realistically than simply 'sharing'. In such ways, with colleagues challenging and supporting each other, the very many good ideas can be assessed – and distinguished from the many 'gimmicks'. Teams rather than individuals can improve teaching and learning and move beyond the temptations of self-aggrandisement in reflective practice.
 - The message to organisations is that individuals need space in which to try out and discuss ideas. Institutions and others need to take the processes seriously and provide supportive experiences from the start.
 - Across and between institutions peer activity means that events are still invaluable – although engagement can come from on-line activity as well as face-to-face. The eCPD and Standards Unit Teaching and Learning programmes were successful in their practical implementation because practitioners were engaged as co-workers creating innovative materials nationally rather than having them imposed from above.
 - How to stop innovative investments becoming obsolete? Seed-corn funding should impact on a range of staff and not just pre-existing enthusiasts. Facilitated staff teams can experiment in a safe environment – which also helps to target bids for innovative funding based on successful experiences and to make this sustainable.
 - Membership organisations can help to turn sector programmes and (eg) materials into resource banks for their members but such processes of sustainability should be built in before the procurement stage. Simpler procurement could specify – including by nominating the role for a membership organisation - how any innovation is to be spread and how the sector will be 'endowed' with any gains. Along the way commissioning bodies could encourage sector staff to join organisations – and recommend how non-members might be included (for example by engineering access to any outputs).
 - A system of knowledge capture/identification and use/transfer (including based on 'lean manufacturing' approaches in engineering) is needed to avoid the loss of experience and skills of departing staff.
 - Any amount of effort will only be effective in overcoming staff resistance and inertia if it reflects the zeitgeist; if, for example, it has the 'force of law' of an officially sanctioned programme or curriculum change.

Conclusions

32. The following suggest themselves as conclusions and outcomes from this study:

- i) Innovation – defined as 'change for the better' rather than 'change for the sake of newness' – is especially relevant in the field of learning technology where, *de facto*, the 'technology' is always changing and where the professional mindset is to look for improvements.
- ii) Innovation more generally in education has greater chance of success if it is seen as officially sanctioned and if the circumstances are such that professionals and institutions see it as in their interest to adopt. But both potential directions for innovation ('top down' and 'bottom up') must be recognised and emphasised.
- iii) Education should be discerning in its use of the word 'innovation' and link it to a business case for change. Thus preferred terms include 'change for the better', 'good practice', 'effective practice', 'efficiency', 'effectiveness', 'success', 'improvement',

‘astuteness’ ‘keeping up with what is going on “out there”’, and even ‘like it or not we have to take account’.

iv) These shifts in language will help meet the concerns of external funders and internal resource controllers – especially if, as we suspect may become the case, ‘innovation’ is seen as a ‘dirty word’ by politicians seeking ‘efficiency’. Innovation can then be directed at problems which need solutions.

v) The key at the level of the institution is to ensure that the prevailing culture supports beneficial change. It is important to differentiate staff room and institutional culture. Prevailing cultures can stifle as well as stimulate improvement. Change can occur because it helps the prospects of the proposer rather than contributing to measurable improvement. Beneficial impacts must influence the behaviour of individual staff as well as institutions. This almost certainly points to a need for all innovation projects to have a “cultural and professional” component.

vi) Ways to achieve beneficial cultural change are well-documented and are reinforced by the findings of this project. But ‘how to’ change (and how leadership should be exercised) must be explained and exemplified in ways which are relevant to individuals and institutions. This includes a change from labelling internal ‘innovation’ projects so that they become ‘improvement’ projects; and ensuring that outcomes are measured against objectives.

vii) The most effective forms of individual professional development are also known and have a venerable history in learning technology and are confirmed by responses to this work. It would be useful to revisit previous FE and HE programme evaluations (for example) to re-emphasise the lessons learned and the most effective interventions. There should be a conscious effort to locate learning technology with factors which have been clearly shown to have a beneficial impact (for example by John Hattie’s work on ‘visible learning’¹⁴ and the subject learning coaches programme¹⁵).

viii) A difference in the current era is that large-scale funded programmes seeking innovative change have all but disappeared and the sectors need ever more to muster shrinking resources to secure progressive changes in teaching and learning. They can do this, for example, by pointing to collaborative initiatives which have produced substantial improvements; these include, for example, the convergence on shared services in the HE library world¹⁶.

ix) All proposals for change, including those in the learning technology domain, need business cases. Proponents must differentiate between ‘obvious’ changes which are worth doing whatever the circumstances (respondents cited investment in wi-fi for learner-owned devices) and un-evidenced speculations. The role for membership organisations like AoC and ALT may be to ‘pick winners’, noting that the lifecycle of much change is long enough to enable wisdom to be arrived at with confidence.

x) Traditionally, the funding from innovation projects has been for capital rather than revenue spending. This was widely regarded as almost perverse, as institutions were forced into ‘creative accounting’ to achieve a key lever of change: activity by staff and therefore time in which their development activities could be achieved. It remains to be seen whether there will be a shift in the balance of programme financial support.

xi) Membership organisations have an opportunity as perhaps never before to

¹⁴ <http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/uoahome/about/staff/j.hattie>

¹⁵ <http://tjp.excellencegateway.org.uk/tjp/slc/index.html>

¹⁶ <http://helibtech.com/Shared+Services>

support change at the sector, institutional and individual level.

xii) The project confirms that they, especially where their missions support the learning technology 'cause', are seen as key to the future spread and sustenance of innovative change.

xiii) Their constituency is generally committed to common purposes and the mechanisms of communication, support and development are available to them and seen as being neutral and objective, rather than being driven by current policy priorities. Furthermore, membership organisations tend not to be seen as intimidating as agencies sometimes are.

xiv) Respondents reinforced the value of peer support highlighted in the survey and interviews. Using a football analogy, it is no use simply trying to 'buy in' talent; rather the 'academy' must devote energy to coaching, putting aspirant staff in touch with the more skilled and new entrants with experienced 'old hands'. There is much scope for mentoring activities led, organised and/or influenced by membership organisations.

xv) Consequently the study supports the view that funding and commissioning bodies should embrace the opportunity to work with membership organisations. This depends in part on the domain of a particular initiative. Generalist organisations have their place but organisations such as NIACE, ALT and UCISA are especially well-placed to support work in the technology in learning domain. ALT has the focus, the committed membership, proven and usable channels of communication and support and, on the evidence of this study, is regarded with respect as a reliable representative of colleagues across FE and HE.

xvi) This has been recognised recently in a statement of support for ALT from a senior minister in the new government. David Willetts said that, "*Membership organisations such as ALT clearly have an important role to play in this changed world. That is why we commend ALT for its role in:*

- *linking together practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers to share best-practice;*
- *facilitating and spreading innovation;*
- *creating learning communities;*
- *supporting cross-sectoral work;*
- *professionally accrediting learning technology practitioners;*
- *developing the evidence-base on which decision-making should depend.*"¹⁷

xvi) So there needs to be clarity about the 'landscape' of membership organisations – how many operate in the sectors and the nature of their roles, especially to be clear about which can gain the ear of government in a strong or effective way and on what issues. Overlap between what different agencies do and did and the level of 'noise' in the system means that government can say it has listened but then only pick the messages which it finds congenial.

xvii) Better coordination between membership organisations and their influential individual members would produce greater focus and impact. Sectors and individuals should recognise the differing roles and strengths of organisations in relation to innovation; their voices and support systems can be directed differently: 'upwards' to funders and government, 'sideways' in collaboration and 'downwards' to their members.

xviii) Funding bodies could short-circuit some of the historical 'long tail' and potential

¹⁷ Statement of Support from the Rt Hon David Willetts, MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills <http://tinyurl.com/325cgcf>

waste of project commissioning, management and delivery by involving from the outset membership organisations which operate in ways which have accountability (to their members) built into their governance, and if, for example, a template such as that suggested above were adopted.

xix) Getting the balance right between project capital and revenue spending is a key to successful outcomes.

xx) Membership bodies are self-evidently interested in the 'continuing' element of CPD; they involve and serve a membership over time for specific purposes. Thus the waste which can occur when funded programmes reach their 'official' end without any succession planning could be obviated by the specified involvement and responsibilities of a membership organisation.

xxi) Given that the current economic and political circumstances require new approaches to development and innovation in straitened circumstances the following suggest themselves as fruitful processes:

- Improving the integration between funded research activities, the activities of membership organisations, and funded programmes. Here we are thinking of parallel programmes like the LSIS Flexibility and Innovation Fund work by learning providers and sector bodies, the programmes funded by JISC, the Technology Exemplar Network, and the LSIS practitioner research fellowship scheme. Where the focus of work is on technology in learning, then organisations like ALT could assist; but ALT could also play a role if there would be scope to use learning technology to provide integration between activities that themselves are not primarily focused on technology in learning.
- National agencies/departments fund/support small-scale thinly-funded innovation programmes, the purpose and design of which takes into account the findings of this study and the linked references herein.
- Such programmes have two main areas of focus: institutional culture change and continuing professional development.
- At the design stage membership organisation/s is/are involved to gain their support for the work and its spread/implementation, with a suitable balance struck between involving the membership organisation(s) and its/their members and the need to ensure that those outside the purview of the membership organisation(s) are also involved.

Appendices

A. Survey questionnaire and introductory explanation

This is provided separately as file **ALT_LSIS_FIF_survey.pdf**.

B. Organisations responding to the survey

Association of Colleges

Barnet College

Becta

Blackboard

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

City of Bristol College

eLearning Network

Hefce

Jisc

London Mathematical Society

Niace

Reid Kerr College, Scotland

Suppliers' Association for Learning Technology and Interoperability in Schools (SALTIS)

Sero Consulting Ltd

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

The 157 Group

Trades Union Congress

Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA)

University and College Union (UCU)

Village e-Learning Consultancy

Note. An individual prominent in an Australasian membership organisation, and a middle manager employed in a large UK FE college responded to the survey as individuals rather than on behalf of their organisation.

C. Interviewees, with dates of interviews

Anna Matthews, Assistant Executive Secretary, Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) – 15/6/2010

Bill Jones, Executive Director, Planning and Performance, The Sheffield College – 9/8/2010

David Sugden, Consultant, Village e-Learning – 2/7/2010

Liz Perry, Consultant – 5/7/2010

Maggie Gregson, Co-Director of the University of Sunderland's Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT) – 17/5/2010

Margaret Bennett Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director: Finance and Resources, Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) – 15/6/2010

Robin Ghurburun, Vice Principal for Innovation and Business Development at City College Norwich – 12/8/2010

D. 4 October 2010 stakeholder workshop - attendees

Adele Cushing (Barnet College)
Anna Mathews (UCISA)
Dave Pickersgill (The Sheffield College)
David Kay (Sero Consulting Ltd)
David Morley (City of Bristol College)
David Sugden (Village eLearning Consultancy and member of the ALT Further Education Committee)
Kevin Donovan (Consultant)
Matthew Dean (Association of Colleges)
Seb Schmoller (ALT)

E. Project Steering Group

Ann Hill (Doncaster College)
Claire Donlan (Middlesbrough College)
Dave Sugden (Village eLearning Consultancy)
David Dyet (Reid Kerr College, Paisley, Trustee of ALT, and Chair of the ALT FE Committee)
Ellen Lessner (Abingdon and Whitney College)
Fred Pickering (Retired director of Barnsley College and Trustee of ALT)
Iain Howie (Stow College, Glasgow)
Karen Ver (CIPD)
Lee Davies (Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute for Learning)
Malcolm Ryan (University of Greenwich)
Rachel Harris (Inspire Research Ltd)

F. Evaluation Report

Inspire Research Ltd was commissioned to undertake a light touch formative evaluation of the above study. This report provides an overview of the evaluation process and findings.

Evaluation process

The evaluation predominately involved desk research, supported by attendance at two steering group meetings and telephone discussions with the project manager and director.

The evaluator received copies of project documentation, including: the finalised PID; steering group meeting notes; consultation questionnaire and questionnaire response data; consultation/validation workshop schedule, list of attendees and notes from the workshop; highlight reports; and draft final report. The study team gave the evaluator the opportunity to provide feedback on these, and specific suggestions were provided for the data collection elements (questionnaire and workshop).

Project management

Standard project management approaches were employed with the development of an outline PID and associated GANTT chart. Progress was reported via highlight reports with tracking of task progress and maintenance of a risk register. Five highlight reports had been envisaged, but in the event three were circulated. The reduced number of reports is a reflection of the slightly delayed start and condensed nature of the questionnaire data collection.

There were two face-to-face steering group meetings; however, communication between meetings was enabled effectively using email. Other online tools employed during the study included SurveyMonkey for the consultation questionnaire, and Meet-o-matic to arrange a convenient date for the consultation workshop.

Data collection

The scope of the questionnaire was developed on the basis of the experience of the study team. It was also informed by previous and new literature on innovation, sustainability, membership organisations and learning, as demonstrated in the background section of the draft final report.

Invitations to take part in the consultation questionnaire were issued on pertinent mailing lists (such as the ALT FE committee) and via direct contact. This resulted in a valuable range of responses from English and Scottish funding bodies, relevant sector bodies, membership organisations (from the UK and Australasia), and the private sector. The number of responses would not be considered a representative sample, but nonetheless acceptable given that this was a scoping study.

Following the questionnaire, seven telephone interviews were conducted with a suitable range of stakeholders, between 17 May and 12 August

The final validation phase took the form of a workshop and gave attendees the opportunity to comment on the draft findings and identify any omissions. The incorporation of a stakeholder review process can be seen as a valuable approach.

Achievement of project aims and intended outcomes

The project originally set out to:

1. To lay the ground for better and more cost-effective support for learning innovation;

2. To enable funders better to address the issue of the long-term sustainability of innovation.

Specifically, the study sought to examine how the spread of innovation could be self-sustaining, and to identify the role of membership organisations in spreading innovation.

The reporting of the scoping study leans towards bulleted excerpts of findings, and is perhaps not the standard synthesis of literature, followed by method, results and discussion found in a more substantial study. This may well be a reflection of the short timescale, and perhaps more pragmatic than academic nature of this scoping study. Nonetheless, the final report does lay the groundwork by providing a useful overview of the literature in relation to learning innovation and sustainability, and presents the views of a range of stakeholders. The conclusions offer suggestions for national agencies and funding bodies to tap into the interests and longevity of membership organisations to enhance dissemination sooner and sustain the outcomes of programmes after funding concludes.

Whether the second project aim has been met cannot be evaluated in the short-term. It is envisaged that the aim may well be achieved if the final report is brought to the attention of the relevant bodies. Given ALT's relationship with JISC, HEFCE, LSIS, SFC, etc this seems likely.

Overall evaluation findings

1. Project documentation was shared effectively and in good time.
2. Evaluation feedback was taken on board where appropriate, and reasons given if not.
3. Sound project management practices were followed within the limits of a small scoping study.
4. Online tools were employed effectively for the purposes of the study, although no central project management tool was used.
5. The study team demonstrated good practice in treating the questionnaire responses with appropriate confidentiality and handling access to the questionnaire with due care.
6. As far as is possible in the timescale the aims have been met although:
 - a. Additional work would be needed to evidence whether the study's conclusions improve cost-effectiveness;
 - b. Distribution of the final report to appropriate individuals and bodies will be required to achieve some of the intended aims.

F. Practical examples of good practice in the sustainable spread of innovation in the technology in learning field identified by survey respondents

The development of standards such as LTI (Learning Tools Interoperability) and Common Cartridge through the IMS organization has directly led to innovation.

- Team provided consultation on helping two business areas re-look at the way they can offer learning and development using a more blended approach.
- e-Olympics run by JISC RSC N and E in Scotland acted as a real catalyst for change.
- In Aberdeen College clear and unequivocal commitment of the Principal to ICT and a willingness to challenge staff who were not engaging. A willingness to go doggedly after cost drivers so that money could be freed up for innovation and technology (eg efficiency of room utilisation, deployment of equipment to maximise usage and efficiency).
- Use of VLEs. Use of cloud computing to (eg) facilitate collaboration among students within/beyond one institution.
- Projects are led from within the curriculum area. Lecturers see the benefit and pass this enthusiasm on to their students. Access to technology is provided along with user support to enable students and staff to engage with ongoing projects.
- Presentation at our events can often lead to the spread of innovation. For example the University of Liverpool presented on their power down software at a UCISA event in 2007. A number of other institutions adopted it following that presentation and the spread in the use of the software was a key component in the University's success at the Green Gown Awards this year. So a presentation of a case study and the informal networking that followed resulted in widespread adoption.
- An alternative approach was adopted for another UCISA event where we sought case studies, brought the best half dozen together to present at an event and published them all. The resources continue to be available online for others to use.
- There is a growing community of practice within the JISC Collaborative Tools project that is at the tipping point of spreading innovative ideas about the use of technology into a wider community. As business and community engagement becomes increasingly important for UK HE, the sector will have to look at how it can use technology to communicate more effectively. <http://collaborativetools4bce.jiscinvolve.org/wp/>
- The following are particularly engaging speakers: Paul Lowe (University of the Arts, London) who presented on an online workspace for students and professional photo journalists. Eric Bohemia (Northumbria): student and employer collaboration on design projects in a virtual environment.
- Increasingly looking at the technology our students are using, and seeing how we can build it into our university systems. We're also getting better at thinking how the students of the future might wish to use technology.
- In several colleges we have encouraged and supported changes to management structures which allow for an integrated approach to the use of technology in learning and teaching and in managing business processes.
- ILT Champions list.
- teachmeet events
- A series of hands on workshops run on campus by the local JISC RSC where practitioners were supported by RSC staff over a number of weeks to apply learning

technology to an area of the curriculum they had selected. At the end of the workshops the participants had developed skills which they had applied in a practical way.

- The Learning Champions JISC Mail list set up in England and Wales. This was a place where many rich discussions took place and ideas were exchanged and developed helping to foster innovation in a supportive collaborative environment.
- The LeTTOL course offered by the Sheffield College
- The Rotherham Digital partnership
- Adaptation of professional research tools for teaching needs: say Matlab and SPSS.
- Media Zoo (University of Leicester): sustained and high profile investment in developing staff skills and awareness of innovation in learning and teaching.
- ASSET project at the University of Reading: incrementally developed approach in-house to address a key issue for many universities (student feedback)
- Use of internal VLE and 'show and tell' sessions among peers (eg 'gadget fest' for technical staff).
- Teaching Fellowship Scheme.
- Peer mentoring : Stow College Glasgow has an excellent and continuous mentoring system for their online tutors which relies on the commitment and professionalism of the tutors and which produces refinement after refinement of their online programme, building innovation from inside rather than relying on external organisations.
- Work done with AS students in London colleges that uses ICT to support AS curriculum innovation
- The advanced PDA and e-Guide programmes were beginning to make sustainable headway when the funding stopped. Here, the participants ('e' experienced) were asked to deliver the course which they themselves had undertaken to a number of their colleagues. They had two days input from professionals and then online and telephone support whilst they prepared and then delivered the training.
- Innovation comes in all shapes and sizes. We must not ignore those who think that the simple use of PowerPoint is innovative! They too need help and coaching in the ways to make their (to them - new and exciting) resource more engaging and (in this case) less wordy. Too many examples of this approach to list here. We must not assume that just because we know all about (for example) cloud computing everyone does (or even should!)
- A working group on information literacy has been active and apparently successful in enthusing practitioners in the field of encouraging learners to grasp the essentials of finding and using information.
- A working group on space planning has been active and apparently successful in enthusing library practitioners to consider the effect of physical spaces on learning activities. (This sometimes has a relation to technology and access to it.)
- The REAP Transformation project was successful in supporting several departments at Strathclyde to adopt new approaches to assessment (underpinned by technology) and also in engaging external departments in this.
- The JISC RSCs in Scotland distributed free accessibility software on USB sticks to make it easy for anyone to start using this software.
- ALT/eLN webinars.

- Edublogosphere
- Technology for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA): the use of hand held devices and text light methods explored when practitioners given 'the hint' and the assurance it was legitimate